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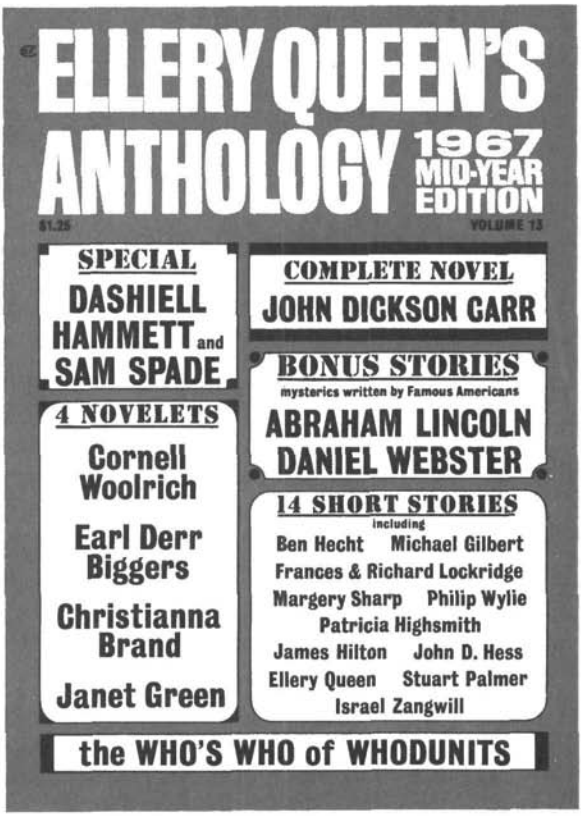


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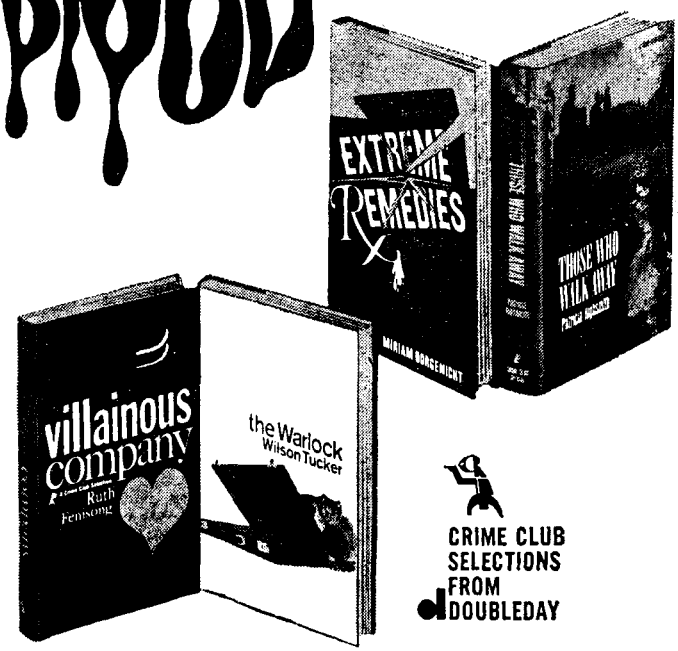


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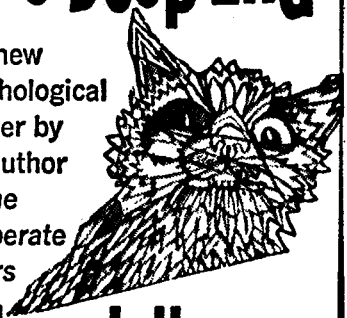

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# THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

*by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG*

HALLEY WAS SURE GLAD THE damn fog had rolled up and was billowing off over the mountains. Hey, if you looked southwest, you could even see a couple of stars. Lucky. They might have to hang around, maybe till morning.

And it was a little too quiet out here. Not much traffic on California Route 1; on a night like this there had better not be. The sea kept booming; it always did. The men shouted once in a while at their work, but they knew their business. They'd have her up on the road, and pretty quick.

Hey, here's my chance, thought Halley, to get all the stuff down, like they keep telling me. So the young Sheriff's Deputy opened the back door of his official car and leaned over to let the dome light fall on his paper work. The husband was sitting inside, and quiet.

"May I please have your name again, sir?" Halley used the polite official drone.

"Hugh Macroy." The other's voice, even in exhaustion, had a timbre and a promise of richness. A singer, maybe? Young Halley's ear had caught this possibility when



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he had first answered the call. He never had seen the man—at least, not too well. Now the lighting was weird—red lights flashing on the equipment, for instance.

"Address?" Halley asked, after he had checked the spelling.

"382 Scott—no, I'm sorry. 1501 South Columbo."

"That's in Santa Carla, sir? Right out of L.A.?"

"Yes." The man was holding his head at the temples, between thumb and two middle fingers. Poor old guy, he didn't hardly remember where he lived. But Halley, who knew better than to indulge in emotions of his own over one of these routine tragedies, figured himself lucky the fellow wasn't cracking up.

"Your age, sir?"

"Forty-five."

(Check. Kind of an old-looking guy.) "Occupation?"

"I am the Pastor at St. Andrew's."

Halley became a little more respectful, if possible, because—well, hell, you were supposed to be. "Just you and your wife in the car, right, sir? En route from Carmel, didn't you say, sir? To Santa Carla?"

"We had expected to stay the night in San Luis Obispo."

"I see, sir. Your wife's name, please?"

"Sarah. Sarah Bright."

Halley wrote down *Sara. "Her* age, please?"

"Fifty-five."

(Huh!) "Housewife, sir, would you say?"

"I suppose so." The man was very calm—too beat, probably, thought Halley, to be anything else. Although Halley had heard some who carried on and cried and sometimes words kept coming out of them like a damn broken faucet.

"And how long you been married?" the Deputy Sheriff continued politely.

"I think it has been two days, if today is Wednesday." Now, in the syllables, the voice keened softly.

"Any chil—" (Oh, oh!) "Excuse me, sir."

"There is Sarah's daughter, in San Luis Obispo. Mrs. Geoffrey Minter. She should be told about this, as soon as may be. She will have been worrying."

"Yes, sir," said Halley, reacting a little crisply not only to the tone but to the grammar. "If you've got her address or phone, I can get her notified, right now."

The man dictated an address and a phone number as if he were reading them from a list he could see. Halley could tell that his attention had gone away from what he was saying. He was awfully quiet.

Halley thanked him and called in from the front seat. "Okay. They'll call her, sir. We probably won't be here too long now," he told the silent figure and drew himself away and shut the car doors gently.

He strolled on strong legs to the brink. He could hear the heavy water slamming into rock forty feet

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below. (Always did.) The night sky was clearing all the way overhead now. There was even a pale moon.

*Some honeymoon,* thought Halley. But he wasn't going to say anything. It had occurred to him that this one might not be routine, not exactly, and that Halley had better watch his step, and be, at all times, absolutely correct.

"How's it going?" he inquired cheerfully of the toilers.

They had a strong light playing on her as she came up in the basket. She was dead, all right.

Macroy got out of the car and looked down at her and maybe he prayed or something. Halley didn't wait too long before he touched the clergyman's arm.

"They'll take her now, sir. If you'll just come with me?"

The man turned obediently. Halley put him into the back seat of the official car and got in to drive.

As the Deputy steered skillfully onto the pavement Macroy said, "You are very kind. I don't think I could drive—not just now." His voice sounded shaky and coming over shaky teeth, but it was still singsongy.

"That's all right, sir," said Halley. But he thought, Don't he know his car's got to stay put and get checked out, for gossakes? That kind of voice—Halley didn't exactly trust it. Sounded old-timey to him. Or some kind of phony.

On the highway, that narrow stretch along the curving cliffs, Halley scooted along steadily and safely toward the place where this man must go. By the book. And that was how Halley was going, you bet—by the book. It might not be a routine case at all.

So forget the sight of Sarah Bright Macroy, aged fifty-five, in her final stillness. And how she'd looked as if she had about four chins, where the crepey skin fell off her jawbone. And thick in the waist, but with those puny legs some old biddies get, sticking out like sticks, with knots in them, and her shoes gone so that the feet turned outward like a couple of fins, all gnarled and bunioned. Um boy, some honeymoon! Halley couldn't figure it.

So swiftly, decisively, youthfully, Halley drove the official car, watching the guy from the back of his head, in case he got excited or anything. But he didn't. He just sat there, quiet, stunned.

Sheriff's Captain Horace Burns was a sharp-nosed man of forty-seven and there was a universal opinion (which included his own) that you had to get up early in the morning to fool him. His office had seen about as much wear as he had, but Burns kept it in stern order, and it was a place where people behaved themselves.

Burns had felt satisfied with Halley, who sat up straight on the hard

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chair by the door, with his young face poker-smooth. His report had been clear and concise. His mien was proper. The Captain's attention was on this preacher. He saw a good-looking man, about his own age, lean and well set up, his face aquiline but rugged enough not to be "pretty." He also saw the pallor on the skin, the glaze of shock in the dark eyes—which, of course, were to be expected.

Macroy, as invited, was telling the story in his own words, and the Captain, listening, didn't fiddle with anything. His hands were at rest. He listened like a cat.

"So we left Carmel early this afternoon," Macroy was saying. "We had driven up on 101. We thought we'd come down along the ocean, having no idea that the fog was going to roll in the way it did."

Behind him a clerk was taking it down. Macroy didn't seem to be aware of that.

"But it did," said that voice, and woe was in it. "As thick a fog as I have ever experienced. We had passed Big Sur. You can't, you know, get through the mountains and change routes."

"You're stuck with it," the Captain said agreeably.

"Yes. Well, it was very slow going and very tiring. We were so much delayed that the sun went down, although you could hardly tell."

"You stopped," Burns prodded, thinking that the voice sounded like a preacher's, all right. "About what time?"

"I don't know. There was a sudden rift and I was able to see the wide place to our right. On the ocean side. A scenic point, I imagine." The Captain nodded. "Well, it looked possible to take the car off the highway there, so I—so I did. I had been so tense for such a long time that I was very glad to stop driving. Then, Sarah wished to get out of the car, and I—"

"Why?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Why did she wish to get out of the car?" The Captain used the official drone. When the minister didn't answer, Burns said, "It has to be included in your statement."

"Yes," said Macroy. He glanced at the clerk. "She needed to—"

When he got stuck, Halley's face was careful not to ripple.

"Answer a call of nature," droned the Captain. "Has to be on record. That's right, Reverend?"

Macroy said with sober sadness, "Yes. I took the flashlight and got out to make sure there was enough margin between us and the edge." He stared over the Captain's head, seeing visions. "The light didn't accomplish much," he went on, "except to create a kind of blank white wall, about three feet before me. But I could check the ground. So I helped her out. I gave her the light and cautioned her. She promised not to go too far. I, of course, got back into my seat—"

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He hesitated.

The Captain said, "Car lights on, were they?"

"Yes."

"She went around behind the car?"

"Yes."

"Go on. Full details, please. You're doing fine."

"I was comforting my right shoulder with a little massage," said the minister with a touch of bitterness, "when I thought I heard her cry out."

"Motor off, was it?" The Captain's calm insistence held him.

"Yes. It was very quiet. Except for the surf. When I heard, or thought I heard . . . I listened, but there was no other cry. In a short while I called to her. There was no answer. I couldn't . . . couldn't, of course, see anything. I called again. And again. Finally, I got out."

"And what did you do?" said the Captain, and again his droning voice held the man.

"The flashlight," he said, "was there."

"On, was it? The light on, I mean?"

"Yes." Macroy seemed to wait for and rely on these questions. "It was lying on the ground, pointing to sea. I picked it up. I began to call and range the whole—the whole—well, it is a sort of platform, you might say, a sort of triangular plateau. I shuffled over all of it—between the pavement and the brink—and she wasn't . . ."

"Take your time," said the Captain.

But the minister lifted his head and spoke more rapidly. "At last, and I don't know when, a car came along. Mercifully it stopped. The driver offered me a ride. But I couldn't leave her." The anguished music was back in the voice. "How could I leave her?"

"He didn't get out? The driver of the car?" said Burns, again coming to the rescue.

"No. No. I begged him to send some help. Then I just kept on ranging and calling and—hoping and waiting, until help came." Macroy sank back.

"He called in, all right," Burns said in his flat tone. "Hung up without giving his name. But he can be found, I think, any time we need him."

Macroy was staring at the Captain with total incomprehension. He said, "I would like to thank him—yes, I would like to some day." Not now, wept his voice. Not yet.

"Can be arranged." Burns leaned back. "Just a couple of questions, Mr. Macroy. Was it your wife's suggestion that you stop the car?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Did she ask you to stop? Or was it your idea?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't following. No, it was my—well, you see, I knew she was in distress. But it was I who saw the opportunity."

"I see," said the Captain. "And

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you got back in the car for reasons of—er—privacy?"

"Values," said Macroy with sudden hollowness. "How ridiculous! In that dangerous spot. I knew how dangerous it was. I shouldn't have let her. I shouldn't."

The Captain, had he been a cat, would have had his ears up, and his tail, curled, would have stirred lazily.

"I will always—" Macroy was as good as weeping now. "Always regret." His eyes closed.

"You were only a few miles from low ground," said the Captain calmly. "You didn't know that?"

Macroy had his face in his hands and he rocked his whole body in the negative.

The Captain, when his continued listening was obviously proving unprofitable, said for the record, "You didn't know. Well, sir, I guess that's about all, for now."

"Where have they brought her?" Macroy dropped his hands.

"I—er—wouldn't go over to the funeral parlor. No point. You realize there's got to be an autopsy?" Macroy said nothing. "Now, we aren't holding you, but you're a lot of miles from home. So I think what you'd better do, Reverend, is go over to the motel and rest there for the night. We'll need your signature on your statement, for one thing. In the morning will do." The Captain stood up.

"Thank you," said Macroy. "Yes. I couldn't leave."

"Did you push your wife?" said the Captain conversationally.

Macroy's face could be no paler. "No," he said with wondering restraint. "I told you."

"The motel," said the Captain in exactly the same conversational manner, "is almost straight across the highway, a little to your left."

Macroy ducked his head in farewell, said nothing, and walked to the door. Halley jumped up and politely opened it for him.

"Halley." Burns was mild but Halley turned quickly and let the door close itself behind the minister.

"Yes, sir."

"This one is going to splash," said Burns glumly. "So watch yourself."

"Yes, sir. Did he do it, sir?" My Master will know, of course, Halley's face said.

"Whether he did or not, we're going to be able to say we went looking for every damn crumb of evidence there ain't going to be." This was, however crossly said, a palsy-walsy kind of thing for Burns to be saying.

"You saw the woman, sir?" The Captain stared sourly but Halley went on. It bubbled out of him. "I can't help thinking—some honeymoon! I mean—"

The Captain grunted. "Yah, and *he's* a pretty good-looking Joe." (Halley thought he concealed his astonishment.) "Well, kiss the cow," said Burns with a warning glare. (Halley hadn't fooled him.)

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"And keep your little old baby face *shut.*"

"Yes, *sir.*"

"Thing of it is," said the Captain, less belligerently, "there was this opportunity. But if he did it, he don't *know* why. And he can't believe it, so he don't really know it at all. Don't think that can't happen."

Halley marveled respectfully.

"You get on over to the funeral parlor and when the daughter shows, bring her by."

Burns turned to instruct the clerk. Damn vultures, he thought. The damn press was out there. Well, *they* didn't have to go by the book; but they'd get precious little out of him.

Saul Zeigler, aged twenty-two, was standing with Carstairs in the hallway of the low building. Zeigler was a local, just out of college, working for peanuts, and green as grass. He deferred to the older man, who was semiretired these days, but still picked up occasional plums for the big L.A. paper. Carstairs, with his connections, had already been on the phone to Santa Carla. Zeigler was impressed.

When they saw a man come out of the Captain's office alone, Carstairs moved in before Zeigler could get his own wits going. The hall was a barren length, with institutional green walls, a worn linoleum floor, and three naked light bulbs strung in a line overhead. The tall thin man looked ghastly.

"Reverend Macroy?" Carstairs was saying. "Excuse me. Terrible tragedy. Could we talk a minute?" Carstairs did not wait for permission. "Your bride was Sarah Bright? That's right, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes."

"My name is Carstairs," said Carstairs, forcing the manly handshake. "I'm that necessary evil, the newspapermen. But it's always best to get the facts from the ones who were there. Better all around."

Smooth, thought Zeigler, as Carstairs kept boring in.

"Sarah Bright was the widow of Herman Bright? Bright Electronics?"

"Yes."

"A very successful enterprise, I understand."

"Yes, I—Yes."

"I understand you'd moved into her mansion on South Columbo?" Carstairs was chatty-sounding.

"Her house," said Macroy wearily.

"About how long had you two been courting, Reverend?" Carstairs became the old buddy.

Zeigler thought the drawn face winced, but the man said quietly, "We met about six months ago."

"She was an older woman?"

"Older than I," said Macroy. "If you would excuse me, please, I am not feeling up to an interview. I would like to get over to the motel now and be alone."

Carstairs brushed this off as if it had never been spoken. "Bright

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died four years ago, wasn't it? And your first wife died when?"

The minister put out one hand and braced himself on the wall. "Nine years ago," he said patiently.

"You and Sarah Bright got married Monday?"

"Yes. In the morning."

"And took off for a honeymoon trip?" Carstairs had shouldered around to face Macroy, who seemed driven closer to the wall.

"Yes. Yes. May I please—" Macroy pleaded.

"I'm very sorry," said Carstairs, "I know this is a very bad time." But his feet in their battered alligator shoes didn't move. "If you could just run over what happened, just briefly? I certainly want to get it absolutely straight, absolutely correct."

"We left Carmel early this afternoon." The minister put his free palm over one eye. "I took the scenic route because I thought she would enjoy—"

"Bum choice this time of year, wasn't it?" said Carstairs in a genial way.

The minister took his hand down and moved until his shoulders touched the wall. He was blinking, as if there was something going on that he could not understand. His silence was thunderous.

Zeigler found himself pushing in to say respectfully, "I understand, sir, that the whole coastline was closed in tight. Worst fog in years. Pretty bad, was it, sir?"

"Yes," said Macroy, but he was looking at the older man and a hostility had sprung up, as invisible but as unmistakable as a gust of wind. The dazed look was beginning to lift from the dark eyes, like mist being blown away.

Carstairs said blandly, "Now, you stopped, sir? Why was that?"

Macroy didn't answer.

"I'm trying to find out how this terrible thing could have happened," said Carstairs, all innocent patience. "Why you stopped, for instance? What I mean, there couldn't have been a whole lot of scenery to see, not in that fog and after dark." Now his innocence was cruel, and he was defensively hostile. Zeigler could feel it on his own skin.

Macroy said, "No." His voice had gone flat.

"Why did you get out of the car? Or, I should say, why did the lady get out? By herself, did she? Didn't have a little lover's spat, I'm sure. Then why did she get out?"

Carstairs was bullying now, and young Zeigler discovered that *he* couldn't take it. So he tugged at the bigger man. "She hadda go, for gosh sake," he said deep in his skinny young throat, "and you know it, so why badger the poor guy? Lay off!"

"So okay," said Carstairs, in the same strangled manner, "but you tell me how in hell she could have *fallen* off that damn cliff?"

"Maybe you don't understand women," said Zeigler fiercely.

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Carstairs laughed. Then Zeigler saw the minister's face. He stood there, leaning against the wall, having made no move to escape. On his face there was such a look—of loathing and sorrow and bewilderment.

"People are always interested," said Carstairs cheerily, turning back on his prey. "Do you happen to know what Mrs. Bright—excuse me, Mrs. Macroy—was worth?"

Macroy shook his head slightly. His lips were drawn back. He looked like a death's-head. Abruptly he thrust himself from the wall. "Let me pass."

"Why, certainly. Certainly." Carstairs played surprise that his courtesy could possibly be questioned. "Thank you very much, sir," he called after Macroy, who walked away from them. Then he said to Zeigler, "And how do you like them velvet tonsils? I'll *bet* he knows. The merry widow was worth millions, kiddo. So maybe she hadda go. Right?"

Zeigler didn't dare open his mouth.

Then, at the far end of the hall, the street doors burst open and a woman and two men entered. The woman came first, weeping violently, her head down, a handkerchief over her mouth.

Macroy saw her and said, "Eunice. I'm so sorry, my dear. So sorry." The music was back in his voice.

But the woman dropped the handkerchief and lifted red-rimmed furious eyes. She was about thirty, already thickening at the middle, no beauty at best, and now ugly in hysteria. "I don't want to talk to you," she shrieked, recoiling. "I never want to see you again. Ever!"

A dapper man with dark-rimmed eyeglasses put his arm around her. "Come now, Eunice. Hush up, sweetheart."

"All *I* know," the woman screamed, "is that my darling mother was just fine until she had to marry *him*, and now she's all smashed up and dead and broken." She wailed and hit out at the air.

Captain Burns was there as if he had flown in. He didn't care for scenes. He and Halley took hold of the woman between them. But she cried out to her husband, "You tell him. He's *not* going to live in my mother's house and have all my mother's lovely things."

Burns said, "You'll come with me, now, Mrs. Minter." And she went.

But Geoffrey Minter lingered to say to Macroy in a high, cold, uninflected voice, "You'd better not try to talk to Eunice, not just now. She's very upset."

(The understatement of the year, thought Zeigler.)

Macroy said, "Geoffrey, believe me—"

But Geoffrey said, "By the way, Eunice wants *me* to take charge of the funeral. And I certainly hope

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you aren't going to raise any objections."

"No," said Macroy, staggering. "No. None at all." He walked away, curving erratically to brace himself against the wall at every few strides.

Zeigler said, "He's never going to make it across the damn road."

"So be his guide," said Carstairs. "You and your bleeding heart. But what you get you bring back to Papa. I'll cover the loved ones."

Young Zeigler went sailing after the minister. Carstairs was waylaying the son-in-law. Zeigler heard Minter's high voice saying, "I don't know the legal position. No new will has been drawn, not since the marriage. We'll find out." He, too, seemed furious, in his own tight way.

Zeigler took the Reverend Macroy's arm and began to lead him.

The arm he held was tense and deeply trembling and it accepted his hand only by default; but Zeigler got them safely across the highway and into the motel office. Zeigler explained to the woman there—"tragic accident"—"no luggage"—"Sheriff's Captain suggested."

The woman was awed and a little frightened. It was Zeigler who took the key. He knew the place. He guided Macroy into the inner court, found the numbered door, unlocked it, switched on a light, glanced around at the lifeless luxury.

He didn't know whether he was now alone with a heartbroken bridegroom—or with a murderer. It was his job to find out, if he could. He said, "Looks all right, sir. Now, how about I call up and have somebody bring some hot coffee? Maybe a sandwich? Probably you ought to eat."

A funny thing was happening to Zeigler's voice. It was getting musical. Damn it, whichever this man was, he was suffering, or Zeigler was a monkey's uncle.

But the minister rejected music. "No, thank you. Nothing." He remained motionless, outside the room. There were hooded lights close to the ground along the flowered borders of this courtyard, and they sent shadows upward to patch that stony face with black. Zeigler looked where the man was looking—at three high scraggly palm tops, grotesque against the clearing sky; between them and the stars some wispy remembrances of that deadly fog still scudded.

"Come in," coaxed Zeigler. "I'll be glad to stick around a little bit, if you'd like—"

"I'd rather be alone."

It was the time for Zeigler to insist solicitously. But he heard himself saying, "Okay. I don't blame you." As he turned away, Zeigler said to himself in disgust, and almost audibly, "But I'm one hell of a newspaperman."

Macroy said, "And I'm one hell of a clergyman."

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He didn't seem to know that he had spoken. He was standing perfectly still, with his face turned up. His hands were clenched at his sides. Up there the palm fronds against that ambiguous sky were like a witch's hands, bent at the knuckles, with too many taloned fingers dripping down.

The moment had an eerie importance, as if this were some kind of rite. To placate the evil mist, now departing? Or a rite of passage?

A goose walked over Zeigler's grave.

Then the Reverend Macroy went into the room and closed the door.

Carstairs pounced. "What? What?"

"Nah. Not a word," said Zeigler, lying instinctively. "Shocked stupid. Poor guy."

"How stupid can you get, for more than a million bucks?" said Carstairs. "Especially if you're untouchable."

"What? What?" said Zeigler immediately.

"I just got off the phone with his Bishop." Carstairs looked disgusted. "Whad'ya know? Your buddy is a Lamb of God or something and pure as the driven snow."

"What did he ever do to you?" asked Zeigler curiously.

"What did I do to him, for God's sake?" Carstairs' eyes looked hot. "So I don't live in the dark ages! I got to get back on the phone."

Zeigler wondered who was guilty of what. He honestly didn't know.

The Bishop, whose name was Roger Everard, came as soon as he could, which was at about ten o'clock the following morning. "I don't think it's wise, Hugh," he said soothingly, as he pulled up his trouser legs to sit down and gaze compassionately at this unshaven face, so drawn with suffering. "I don't think you should make any such decision, and certainly not so precipitously. It is not wise at this time."

"But I *cannot*—" said Macroy.

"Surely you understand," said Everard, who often had a brisk executive way of speaking, "that these people are only doing what is their obligation, according to law. Nobody seriously imagines, my dear fellow, that this was anything but an accident. And you must not feel abandoned, either. After all, you should realize that the members of your congregation can scarcely rally around when they don't even know where you are. Now, now." The Bishop didn't pat him on the head, but he might as well have. "There are certain things that must be done and I am here to do them."

"I am not—" said Macroy in triple gasps, "good enough—for the job."

"You have had a terrible shock," said the Bishop didactically, "a grievous loss, and a very bad night. I beg you to be guided by me. Will you be guided by me?"

The Bishop had already tried

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praying aloud, but when he had seen from a corner of his eye that the praying was only increasing Macroy's distress, he had cut it short.

"You know," he continued, leaving God temporarily unmentioned, "that I am perfectly sure of your complete innocence, that I entirely understand, that I mourn your dear wife with you, and that I want only to be helpful and do what is best? You know that, do you not?"

"I know," groaned Macroy.

"Well, now. Here is what I advise. First, you must make yourself presentable. I believe that your suitcase is now available. Then, since you are not to be in charge—and after all, Hugh, Sarah *isn't here*—you must come home."

"Where is home?" Macroy said. "I gave up the apartment. And I cannot go to Sarah's house."

"Home with me, of course," said the Bishop triumphantly. "Now, I have brought along young Price. His father used to do my legal work and the son has more or less inherited. Freddy may not be the churchman his father was, but he is trained and intelligent and surely he can be helpful in this unfamiliar thicket. There must be an inquest, you see. I want you to talk to him, and then you must talk to the Sheriff's man, but I should imagine only briefly. And, Hugh, I want you to brace yourself to your tasks. I shall drive you by your church and you will go to your office long enough to cancel or rearrange your appointments and delegate your responsibilities. You must be strong and you must not be afraid, for remember—" and the Bishop went into scripture.

When he had finished, the face was looking somewhat less strained; so the Bishop did pat Macroy, although only on a shoulder, and then he trotted back across the road to see whether there was any other way in which he could be helpful. A very busy man himself, the Bishop had had to cancel several appointments; but he did not begrudge his time and effort in this emergency. Obviously, poor Macroy was devastated, and the Bishop must and would take over.

Frederick Price, a busy young man in his middle thirties, ready and willing to be useful, came swinging into the court of the motel, carrying the Reverend Macroy's suitcase, which had been taken from Macroy's car. The car was now parked behind the Sheriff's office, still subject to examinations of some technical kind.

Price knocked on the proper door and went in, introduced himself, and offered the minister his own possessions. He saw the strain and the fatigue, of course, and was not surprised. He didn't believe this man was guilty of any crime. He guessed him to be a sensitive type and thought the whole thing, especially the damned red tape, was a

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rotten shame under the circumstances. But Price was well acquainted with red tape.

As Macroy opened the suitcase and took out his shaving kit and a clean shirt, Price said, "I've been talking to Burns and the others. The inquest is set for Friday morning. I don't think we'll have any trouble at all, sir. I'll be with you. You'll be all right, sir, so don't worry. It's only a formality. As a matter of fact, there is no evidence of *any* kind."

"Evidence?" said Macroy vaguely. He went into the bathroom to shave, leaving the door open.

"Oh, by the way," sang out Price, loudly enough to be heard over the buzz of the little electric machine, "they found that motorist. The one who came by?" Price was practising lay psychology. He'd better not pour it on too thick or too soon—not all that he had found out. Chat a little. Engage the mind. Distract the sorrow. Un-numb the man, if he could.

"Captain Burns was pretty clever," he continued. "As soon as that call came in last night, he guessed from where. So right away he calls a man—Robbins is his name—the man who runs the first all-night gas station you hit once you're off the cliffs. He asked this Robbins to take a look and see if anyone had just been using the phone booth, and if possible to get the license number on his car. But the gas-station man did even better, because the fellow had used his credit card."

Price got up and ambled toward the bathroom, not sure he was being heard. Macroy seemed to be avoiding the sight of himself in the mirror while he shaved.

"Name was Mitchell Simmons."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The man who stopped, out there. On California One." Price understood Macroy's fragmented attention.

"He was very kind," murmured Macroy.

"What he was," said Price, "was very drunk. Oh, he corroborates what you say, of course. He's a salesman. Admits he was in high spirits, to coin a pun, and in the mood to pick up waifs and strays. Which is a risk, you know."

"It is?"

"Matter of fact," said Price cheerily, "it was one of his strays who phoned the Sheriff's office. Your kind friend was in no condition to dial, I guess."

The minister turned his clean-shaven face and it was full of pain.

Price said quietly, "I'm sorry. Didn't mean to say he wasn't kind. Look, I've got some further details. I suppose you'll want to know—er—just how she died. Burns will tell you. Or I can, if you like."

"Thank you," said Macroy. He came back into the bedroom and started to unbutton his rumpled shirt. "Yes?"

"She broke her neck on the

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rocks," said Price. "So it was instantaneous, if that's any comfort. No pain at all."

Macroy's face was still.

"She—well, you see—" Price was remembering uncomfortably that it may have taken very little time to fall forty feet, but it had taken some. "She was washed to and fro until she was—" Price didn't have the heart to say how battered. "Well, soaking wet, for one thing. The Coroner says that her bladder was empty, but that has *no* meaning. With death—"

Macroy sat down abruptly and put his hands over his face. "Go on," he said.

"That—er—part of it," said Price. "It's a little unfortunate that it has to be brought out. But I think I can assure you that it will all be handled in good taste. I think, by the way," Price changed the subject gladly, "that Minter was cooled off considerably. He certainly made a few poorly chosen remarks last night—about her estate, I mean. But he's thought twice about it and he'll be more circumspect in the future."

Macroy was shaking his head. "I don't want her money. I won't have anything to do with Sarah's money. That wasn't what she was worth."

Price was unable to keep from sighing his relief. "That's fine," he said innocently. "Now, please don't worry about Friday's inquest, sir. I'll be there, right by your side all the time. The thing is to give your testimony as quietly as possible and try to—I could coach you a little, perhaps. I've been through this before, you know."

"Thank you. Have they—finished with her?" Macroy took his hands down and seemed stiffly controlled. He didn't look at Freddy Price.

"The body will be released in time to be flown to Santa Carla for services on Saturday. Mrs. Minter wants the services there—because of her mother's friends. I'm sure—" Price stuck. The fact was, he couldn't be sure that Macroy was going to be welcome at his wife's funeral.

Macroy stood up and reached for his clean shirt.

"As for this inquest, that has to be, you know," said the young man. "It *will* be an ordeal. Why should I lie to you?"

Macroy looked at him curiously.

"But there's nothing to worry about, really," said Price heartily. "The important thing is to get you completely in the clear."

"Is it?" said Macroy monotonously.

In the car later on, the Bishop excused himself and began to work on some papers. Price was riding next to the Bishop's driver. Macroy sat silent in a rear corner.

When they pulled up before St. Andrew's, the Bishop noticed that Macroy was looking at it as if he had never seen it before. "Come," said Everard briskly, "run in. Your

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secretary will be there, I assume. Just make your arrangements as quickly as possible."

Price looked around. "You clergymen sound as if you're in the old rat-race, just like everybody else."

"Too true," sighed the Bishop, "too true."

Macroy got out and walked through the arch and across the flagstones and then into his office. Miss Maria Pinero, aged forty, leaped up and cried out, "Oh, Mr. Macroy! Oh, Mr. Macroy!" She had heard all about it on the air.

In the car Price said to the Bishop, "It's still a little hard to figure how she could have fallen. They didn't find a thing, sir. They can't even be sure just where she went over. Too many people messed around out there, while they were getting her up the cliff. But there's nothing for *him* to worry about, that's for sure."

"I see," said the Bishop, looking sternly over the tops of his spectacles. "Guide him, Freddy, will you? He's in a sad state, I'm afraid."

"Do you think, sir," said Freddy Price, "I could possibly ask him to tone down his voice? It might sound—well, just a bit theatrical."

The Bishop's brows moved. "Bring it to his attention. That is, if you can get his attention." The Bishop sighed deeply. "No relatives. Nobody who can reach him on that needed human level. Well . . ."

"I'll take care of everything," Miss Pinero was saying. "Of course, I will. I understand just how you feel. It seems so cruel. To get out, just to stretch her legs after a long, long drive—" She began to weep.

Miss Pinero was not an unhandsome woman, but something about her did not appeal to men. As a matter of fact, Miss Pinero did not like men, either. But the Reverend Macroy was different. So kind, so clean and gentle—and so distant. She would do almost anything for him. She had been so happy that he wouldn't be lonely any more.

"But God knows, doesn't He," she wept, "and we must believe that it is, somehow, for the best?" Carried away by her own noble piety —for it was her loss, too—she snatched up his right hand. Macroy snatched it away.

She looked up at him with tear-dimmed vision. She had never so much as touched him before, but surely he must know that taking his hand would have been like kissing the hem of his garment.

"I must leave now," He sounded strange.

"I'll be here," she cried, "and whatever you ask—"

"Forgive me," he said hoarsely.

He walked away. She knew that he staggered as he turned a corner, and her heart skipped. He sounded as if he couldn't bear to think of what she had almost done. Neither

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could she. Miss Pinero trembled. She wished it hadn't happened. She wished that Sarah Bright was still alive. Maria had felt so deliciously safe, and free to go on worshipping him.

The newspapers gave the story considerable space. After all, it had everything. They cautiously asked no questions, but they inevitably raised them. How could the elderly bride have fallen? There were some blithe spirits in the city who took to collecting the assorted circumlocutions having to do with the poor woman's reason for going off alone into the foggy dark. There was one columnist, based in the east who—supposing that, of course, there was no such thing in Southern California as a religious group that was *not* led by some crackpot—was open to a suit at law. The Bishop considered it wiser to ignore him.

Macroy did not read the newspapers.

On Friday the inquest came rather crisply to the verdict of "Death from Accidental Causes."

Halley, telling how he had been the first to see a body, down below, was a model of professional objectivity. The medical part was couched in decently euphemistic language. Eunice Minter had not attended at all. Geoffrey Minter said that, as far as he knew, Mrs. Sarah Bright Macroy had been a happy bride. He exuded honorable fairness. Freddy Price was pleased on the whole with Macroy's behavior.

The minister, however, looked beaten and crushed. His voice was low and sad and tired. Everything droned along properly. When the Coroner, who was a straightforward country type, said bluntly, "You got back into the car for reasons of leaving her alone to do what she had to do?" Macroy answered, his voice dead against the dead silence of the room, "I thought, at the time, that it was the courteous thing to do."

A soft sigh ran across the ranks of those present.

"So you have no idea how she came to fall?" pressed the Coroner.

"No, sir."

And the Coroner thought to himself, "Well, the truth is, me neither."

But when Price spoke finally, to inform the world in a quiet and matter-of-fact manner that the Reverend Macroy firmly and irrevocably refused to have any part of the Bright money—that did it.

Price got the minister through the swarming cameras and away, with an air of "Aw, come on, boys, knock it off," jaunty enough to arouse nobody's aggressions.

But afterward, as they drove back to the Bishop's house, young Price for the life of him could think of nothing to chatter about. Freddy would have enjoyed hashing it all

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over; he'd done his job. But this man was a type he didn't understand. So Freddy made do with the car radio.

The Bishop's spacious residence was well staffed; Macroy had every creature comfort. But the Bishop was simply too busy to spend many hours or even an adequate number of minutes with his haunted guest, who from time to time renewed his plea for a release from his vocation.

The Bishop, refusing to consider this, continued to advise patience, pending a future clarity. But, he said, obviously someone else would have to take over the Sunday services at St. Andrew's. The Bishop had resolved to do it himself.

But he did think that if Macroy, with the help of God, could find the fortitude, he also ought to be there.

This martyred innocence, thought the Bishop (who *had* read the papers) had its rights, but also its duties. A man, he mused, must stand up to adversity.

On Saturday, at two o'clock, the funeral of Sarah Bright Macroy was well attended. The Minters and their two teen-age children sat invisibly in a veiled alcove. But those of Macroy's congregation who had had the temerity to come, spotted him and nudged each other, when he arrived a trifle late and sat down quietly at the very back of the chapel.

He did not join the family at any time, even afterward. Nor did he speak to any of his own people. When it was over, he vanished.

He had looked like a ghost. It was a little—well, odd.

On Sunday the Bishop, at the last minute, found himself unable to conduct the nine-thirty service, which had to be cancelled. (Although the organist played.) In consequence, at eleven o'clock, St. Andrew's had all its folding chairs in its aisles.

Macroy, in his robe, was up there, inconspicuously, at the congregation's right or contra-pulpit side where, when he was sitting down, he was actually invisible to most. When they all stood, it was noticed that he did not sing the hymns; but he did repeat with them the Lord's Prayer, although his voice, which they were accustomed to hear leading, so richly and musically, the recitation of the ancient words, seemed much subdued.

Then the Bishop, who had never, himself, dwelt on some of the circumstances, and did not, for one instant, suppose that anyone *here* could do less than understand their essential pathos, made an unfortunate choice of words in the pastoral prayer.

"Oh, God," he prayed in his slight rasp, "Who, even in fog and darkness, seest all, be Thou his comfort; station him upon the rocks of his faith and Thy loving-kindness, that he may stand up—"

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The ripple ran, gasping from some of the listeners, yet not so much sound as movement, swinging the whole congregation like grass, before it ceased and all sat stiffly in a silence like plush.

The Bishop sat down, a bit pinkly. He could not see Macroy very well. Macroy did not seem to have taken any notice. In fact, Macroy had been moving, looking, acting like an automaton. The Bishop was very much worried about him, and he now bemoaned his own innocence, which had tripped him up, on occasion, before. When it was time, he preached an old sermon that was sound, although perhaps a little less than electrifying.

Then there they were, standing together in the Narthex, as was the custom at St. Andrew's, Macroy a tall black pole beside the little black-robed beetle-bodied Bishop.

Now the people split into two groups, sheep from goats. Half of them simply went scurrying away, the women contriving to look harrassed, as if they were concerned for a child or had something on the stove at home, the men just getting out of here. The other half lined up, to speak first to the Bishop and gush over the honor of his appearance in their pulpit.

Then they each turned righteously to Macroy and said phrases like "So sorry to hear" and "Deepest sympathy" or a hearty "Anything I can do."

About twenty of them had gone by, like a series of coded Western Union messages, when Macroy put both hands over his face and burst into loud and anguished sobs.

The Bishop rallied around immediately and some of the older men shouldered through to his assistance. They took—almost carried —Macroy to his own office where, Macroy having been put down in his chair, the Bishop firmly shut the door on everybody else. He sat down himself, and used his handkerchief, struggling to conquer his disapproval of a public exhibition of this sort. By the time the Bishop had recovered his normal attitude of compassionate understanding, Macroy had stopped making those distressing and unmanly noises.

"Well, I was wrong," the Bishop announced good-naturedly. "I ought not to have urged you to come here and I am sorry for that. You are still in shock. But I want you to remember that *they* are also in shock, in a way."

The Bishop was thinking of the reaction to his boner. He was not going to quote what he had inadvertantly said, since if Macroy had missed it, the Bishop would accept this mercy. Still, he felt that he ought to be somewhat blunt; it might be helpful.

"I'll tell you something, Macroy," he said. "You have got a fat-cat suburban bunch in this church, with economic status and—may the Lord help them all—middle-class notions of propriety. My dear fel-

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low, they can't help it if they don't know *what* to say to you, when it has probably never crossed their minds that the minister or his wife might sometimes have to go to the bathroom."

Then the Bishop sighed. "This is especially difficult for them, but they'll stand by you—you'll see. I'm sure that you can understand them, as well or better than I."

"It's not that I don't understand them," said Macroy. "It's that I can't love them." He had put his head down on his desk, like a child.

"Oh, come now—"

"I cannot," said Macroy. "So I must give it up. Because I cannot do it."

"I think," said the Bishop in a moment, "that you most certainly can't—that is, not yet. You must have time. You must have rest. Now, I shall arrange for substitutes here. Don't worry about it."

"Don't you still understand?" said Macroy drearily.

"Of course I do! Of course I do! It was simply too much for you."

"Yes. Yes, if you say so."

"Then, if the coast is clear, we had better go home." The Bishop thought that this might become a serious breakdown. Poor tortured soul.

That evening the Bishop bustled from his study into his living room, where Macroy was sitting disconsolately idle.

"Now," the Bishop said in his raspy voice, "you know that you are very welcome in this house. There is plenty of room. The cooking is *not* bad. Everything here is yours. However, I am afraid that I shall have to be out of town for a day or two, beginning tomorrow. And I do not like to leave you all alone in your present state. So I am going to ask you to do something for me, Hugh. Will you promise?"

"Yes?" said Macroy listlessly.

"Will you talk to a Dr. Leone tomorrow?"

"A doctor?"

"He is a psychiatrist whom I've known for years. There have been occasions . . . he is excellent in his profession. He can give you a full hour tomorrow, beginning at one o'clock. I have set up the appointment and I think it is wise—very wise—that you keep it. He can help you through this very bad time."

"What?" said Macroy strangely. "Isn't God enough?"

"Ah, ah," said the Bishop, shaking a finger, "you must not despise the scientist. In his own way he is also a seeker after the truth. And God knows that you need some human help. That's why I simply cannot leave you here—don't you see? —alone. Yet I should go, I must. So will you please be guided by me and please do as I suggest?"

"Yes, I will," said Macroy apathetically.

"She died when you were twenty-five?" Doctor Leone said.

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He had observed the harsh lines on this face relax in memories of childhood, and he began to forgive himself for his own faulty technique. Well, he had to push this one. Otherwise the man would still be sitting silent as an owl by day, and there wasn't time. The doctor already knew that he would never see this man again.

"You were the only child?" he continued. "You must have adored her."

"I didn't pray to her, if that's what you mean," said Macroy with a faint touch of humor. "I loved my mother very much. But she wasn't perfect."

"How not?"

"Oh, she wasn't always—well, she didn't love everyone. She had a sharp tongue sometimes." But the voice was as tender as a smile.

"Didn't always love you, for instance?" the doctor said lightly.

"Of course she loved me. Always. I was her son." This was unimpassioned.

"Tell me about your father."

"He was a machinist, a hard-working man. A reader and a student by night. Very solid and kind and encouraging."

"You were how old when he died?"

"He died when I was twenty-seven—suddenly and afar."

The doctor listened closely to the way the voice caressed a phrase. "He loved you, of course. And you loved him."

"He was my father," the minister said with a faint wonder.

The doctor was beginning to wonder. Is he putting me on? He said with a smile. "Just background—all that we have time for today. Now, tell me about your first wife. Was it a happy marriage?"

"It was, indeed," said Macroy. "Emily was my young love, very dainty and sweet. A cherishable girl." The doctor heard the thin and singing overtone.

"You had no children?"

"No. We were sad about that. Emily, I suppose, was always frail."

"After she died, what did you do?"

"Went on, of course."

The doctor continued to suspend judgment. "Now, this second marriage. What did you feel for Sarah?"

"She was a lovely, lively spirit," said the minister. "We could talk. Oh, how we could talk." He fell silent.

"And you loved her?"

"Not with the same kind of love," said Macroy, faintly chiding, "since we weren't young any more. We were very—compatible, I believe, is the accepted word."

Putting me on? He must be, thought the doctor. "And her money was no object," he said cheerily.

"The love of money is the root, Doctor."

"All right. I know my questions may sound stupid to you," said Leone. "They sound pretty stupid to

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me, as a matter of fact." He leaned back. Leone never took notes. He was trained to dictate, in ten minutes, the gist of fifty. "Now, I'm going to become rather inquisitive," he announced, "unless you know that you not only can but should speak frankly to me."

Macroy said gently, "I understand." But he said no more.

Going to make me push, thought the doctor. All right. "Tell me about your honeymoon."

"I see," said Macroy. "You want to know—whether the marriage was consummated? Will that phrase do?"

"It will do."

"No, it was not," said Macroy. "Although it would have been, sooner or later, I think. She was—so warm-hearted and so lovable a presence. But you see, we had understood, quite well . . ."

"You had both understood," said the doctor, more statement than question.

"I told you that we could talk," said Macroy, catching the latent doubt. "And that meant about anything and everything. That was our joy. As for—after all, in my case, Doctor, it had been nine years. I was a Minister of the Gospel," he added in a moment, gently explanatory.

"Did you try with Sarah and fail?" the doctor said easily.

"No."

"There wasn't a disillusion of any kind in the intimacy?"

"No. No. We enjoyed. We enjoyed. I can't be the only man in the world to have known that kind of joy."

Macroy's face contorted and he became silent.

"Which you have lost," the doctor said softly.

"Which I have lost. Yes. Thank you." The man's head bent.

"So the very suggestion that you —yourself,—might have thrown all this violently away . . . It must have been very painful to you."

"Yes."

"Knowing that you wouldn't, couldn't, didn't—there's still that sense of guilt, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Surely you recognize that very common reaction to sudden death, to any death, in fact." The doctor wasn't having any more nonsense. "You have surely seen it, in your field, many times. People who compulsively wish that they had done what they had not done and so on?"

"Oh, yes, of course. But am I not guilty for letting her venture alone on that cliff?"

"It was the natural thing."

"It is the human convention." The voice was dreary and again it ceased.

The Doctor waited, but time flew. So he said, "Every one of us must take his time to mourn his dead. But Bishop Everard tells me that you wish to give up the ministry, *now*. Why, Mr. Macroy?"

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Macroy sighed deeply.

"I am thinking about the silly, but seemingly inevitable snickering, because of the circumstances."

The doctor hesitated. "The—er—circumstances do make an anecdote—for thoughtless people," he said. "That must be very hard for you to endure."

"Oh, my poor Sarah."

"Then, is this a factor?"

"I will say," said Macroy, "that I don't altogether understand that snickering. And why is it inevitable? If I may speak frankly to you, Doctor—"

Leone thought that there was a glint of life and challenge in the eyes.

"Surely," said Macroy, "every one of us knows his body's necessities and furthermore, knows that the rest of us have them, too. Yet all of man's necessities are not as funny as all that. Men don't think it funny, for instance, that they *must* eat."

"The whole toilet thing," said the doctor, "is too ancient and deep-rooted to be fully understood. It may be that the unpleasantness is too plain a reminder of our animal status."

"We laugh at what we hate so much to admit?" Macroy said quickly.

"Possibly." The doctor blinked.

"'Tis a pity," Macroy said in mourning.

"Why," said the doctor, who was beginning to feel that *he* had fallen into some trap, "is it that a man like you, who can look with this much detachment at human inconsistencies, cannot transcend an unimportant and temporary embarrassment? Surely, you ought not to be driven out of a life's work just because of—"

"*I* didn't say that those were my reasons."

"I'm sorry. Of course you didn't. What are your reasons?" The doctor was sunny.

"I cannot continue," said Macroy slowly, "because there are too many people I cannot love."

"Could you—er—amplify?"

"I mean that I felt so much anger. Fury. I hated them. I despised them. I wanted to hit them, shake them, scream at them, even hurt them back."

"In particular?"

"It began—" said Macroy. "No, I think that when the police officer asked me whether I had pushed Sarah to her death . . . Oh, it hurt. Of course, it did. But I remembered that he might be compelled, by the nature of *his* duties, to ask me such a thing. But then there was a newspaperman. And when to him . . ." The face was bitter. "Sarah's death meant somewhat less than the death of a dog would have meant to a man who never cared for dogs . . ."

Macroy's voice became cutting-sharp. "That's when I found myself so angry. I hated and I still do hate that man. From then on I have seemed to be hating, hating . . ."

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The doctor was lying low, rejoicing in this flow.

"Sarah's own child, for instance," Macroy went on, "who was so cruel in her own pain. Oh, I know she was not herself. But I had better not go near her. I would want to make her suffer. Don't you see? Of all the contemptible . . . I want revenge. Yes, I do. That young lawyer who missed the point. I know he meant no harm, but I just couldn't . . . I even loathe my poor secretary. For making some kind of idol out of me. But I'd known and understood and borne that for years. Even if she is wrong to do that, I should not suddenly *loathe* her for it. Yet I find I do. And I loathe the cowards and the hypocrites and the snickerers—they all disgust me. There seems to be no way that I can bring myself to love them. I simply cannot do it."

"You cannot love?" droned the doctor hypnotically.

"Even the Bishop, who is a good man. When he refuses—oh, in all good heart—to hear the truth I keep trying to tell him, sometimes I must hang on desperately to keep from shouting at him. Isn't that a dreadful thing?"

"That you can't love?" said the doctor. "Of course it is a dreadful thing. When your young love died so many years ago, perhaps—"

"No. *No!*" Macroy groaned. "You don't seem to understand. Listen to me. I was commanded to love. I was committed to love. And I thought I could, I thought I did. But if I *cannot do it,* then I have no business preaching in His Name."

"I beg your pardon?" The doctor's thoughts were jolted.

"In the Name of Jesus Christ."

"Oh, yes. I see."

"No, you don't! You don't even know what I'm talking about."

The doctor got his breath and said gently, "I see this. You have a very deep conviction of having failed."

"Indeed," said Macroy, "and I am failing right now. I would like, for instance, to hit you in the mouth—although I *know* you are only trying to help me."

The minister put both hands over his face and began to cry bitterly.

The doctor waited it out, and then he said that they wouldn't talk about it any more today . . .

When the Bishop returned to town he had a conference with Dr. Leone.

"He's had a traumatic experience," the doctor said, "that has stirred up some very deep guilt feelings, and, in projection, an almost unmanageable hostility that he never knew was there. I doubt he is as sophisticated as he thinks he is—in his understanding of the human psyche, I mean. He does need help, sir. He isn't really aware of the demons we all harbor. It is going to take a lot of digging to get at the root."

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"Hm. A lot of digging, you say?"

"And I am not the man," said Leone. "I doubt that he and I can ever establish the necessary rapport. Furthermore, my fees—"

"I know." The Bishop was much distressed. "But what is to be done, I wonder. He isn't fit, you imply, to go on with his tasks?"

"You know he isn't."

"Oh, me," The Bishop sighed. "And he has nobody, nowhere to be taken in. Since I—" the Bishop shook his head sadly— "am not the man, either. You don't think this—this disturbance will simply go away? If he has shelter? And time to himself?"

"May I suggest," said Leone smoothly, "that the State Hospitals are excellent? Very high-class in this state. And even the maximum fee is not too high."

"Well, as to that, there is what amounts to a Disability Fund. I should also suppose that the Minters, who are very rich people—" The Bishop was thinking out loud. "—even if the marriage has to be declared invalid. But wouldn't it be cruel?" The Bishop blinked his eyes, hard. "Am I old-fashioned to think it would be cruel?"

"Yes, you are," said the doctor kindly. "He needs exactly what he can get in such a place—the shelter, the time, the trained attention. As far as time goes, it may be the quickest way to restore him."

"I see. I see." The Bishop sighed again. "How could it be done?"

"He would have to commit himself," said Leone gently.

"He would do so, I think," said the Bishop, "if I were to advise him to. It is a fearful—yet if there is no better alternative—"

"The truth is," said Leone fondly, "you have neither the free time nor the training, sir."

"We shall see," said the Bishop, who intended to wrestle it out in prayer. "We shall see."

Two years later Saul Zeigler approached the entrance with due caution. He had stuck a card reading PRESS in his windshield, anticipating argument since he wasn't expected; but to his surprise there was no gate, no guard, and no questions were asked. He drove slowly into the spacious grounds, found the Administration Building, parked, locked his car, and hunted down a certain Dr. Norman.

"Nope," said the doctor, a sandy-colored man who constantly smoked a pipe, "there is no story. And you won't write any. Absolutely not. Otherwise, how've you been?"

"Fine. Fine," said Zeigler, who was up-and-coming these days and gambling that he could become a highly paid feature writer. He'd had some bylines. "Just insane, eh?"

The doctor grinned cheerfully. "Not my terminology."

"Put it this way: you're not letting him out?"

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"Uh-uh."

"Will you ever?"

"We hope so."

"When?"

The doctor shrugged.

"Well, I suppose I can always make do with what I've heard," said Zeigler impudently.

"Saul," said the doctor, "your dad was my old buddy and if I'd been the dandling type, I probably would have dandled you. So you won't do this to me. Skip it. Go see Milly. She'll have a fit, if you don't drop in to say hello."

"So would I," Zeigler said absentmindedly. "Tell me, *did* he murder his wife?" There was no answer. "What set him off, then?"

"I'm not going to discuss a case with you or anybody else but the staff," said the doctor, "and you know it. So come on, boy, forget it."

"So how come I hear what I hear?" coaxed Zeigler.

"What do you hear?"

"You mean this is an instance of smoke without even one itty-bitty spark of fire? Not even one *semi*-miraculous cure?"

The doctor snorted. "Miraculous! Rubbish! And you're not going to work up any sensational story about him or this hospital. I can't help it if millions of idiots still want to believe in miraculous cures. But they're not coming down on us like a swarm of locusts. So forget it."

"I've met Macroy before, you know," said Zeigler, leaning back.

"Is that so?"

"Yep. On the night it happened."

"And what was your impression?"

"If I tell you," said Zeigler, "will you, just for the hell of it and off the record, tell *me* what goes on here?"

The doctor smoked contemplatively.

"Religion and psychiatry," said Zeigler, letting out his vocabulary and speaking solemnly, "have been approaching each other recently, wouldn't you agree, Doctor?—in at least an exploratory manner. Supposing that you had, here, a clue to that growing relationship. Is that necessarily a 'sensational' story?"

"Oh, no, you don't," said the doctor. "For one thing, he isn't preaching religion."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

Zeigler said, "You won't even let me talk to him, I take it."

"I didn't say so. If we understand each other—"

"Well, it was a long drive and it shouldn't be a total loss. Besides, I'm personally dying of curiosity. My impression, you want? Okay. I felt sorry for him, bleeding heart that I am," Zeigler mocked himself. "He was in shock and he sure had been pushed around that night. If he didn't always make plain sense, I wouldn't have made sense, either." Zeigler waited.

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"I will admit," said the doctor between puffs, "that there have been some instances of sudden catharsis." He cocked a sandy eyebrow.

"Don't bother to translate," said Zeigler, crossing the trouser legs of his good suit, because Zeigler got around these days, and needed front. "I dig. How many instances?"

"A few."

"Quite a few? But no miracles. Didn't do a bit of good, eh?"

"Sometimes treatment was expedited," The doctor grinned at his own verbiage. "We *are* aware of a running undercurrent. One patient advises another. All right, you can go and talk to him."

"So if he doesn't preach, what does he do?"

"I don't know. They talk their hearts to him."

"Why don't you find out?" said Zeigler in astonishment.

"Tell me this, Saul. On that night was he annoyed with *you* in any way?"

"Might have been." Zeigler frowned. "He sure brushed me off. But he had taken quite a beating. I didn't blame him."

"Why don't you go and see him?" the doctor said. "I'd be interested in the reaction. Afterwards, come by, and we'll make Milly feed us a bite of lunch."

"Where can I find him?" Zeigler was out of the chair.

"How should I know?" said the doctor. "Ask around."

Zeigler went to the door, turned back. "I don't want to hurt him, Doc. How shall I—"

"Just be yourself," the doctor said.

Zeigler came out into the sunshine of the lovely day. He had never been to this place before and it astonished him. He had expected a grim building with barred windows and here he was on what looked like the sleepy campus of some charming little college, set between hills and sprawling fields, with the air freshened by the not too distant sea. There were green lawns and big trees, and some mellow-looking buildings of Spanish design. There was even ivy.

It was very warm in the sun. He unlocked his car, tossed his jacket inside, and snatched the PRESS card away from the windshield. He locked the car again, and began to walk. Ask around, eh? There were lots of people around, ambling on the broad walks, sitting on the grass, going in and out of buildings. Zeigler realized that he couldn't tell the patients from the staff. What a place!

The fourth person he asked was able to direct him.

The Reverend Hugh Macroy was sitting on a bench along the wide mall under one of the huge pepper trees. He was wearing wash trousers and a short-sleeved white shirt without a tie. He seemed at ease—just a handsome, well-tanned, middle-aged gentleman,

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quietly growing older in the shade.

Zeigler had begun to feel, although he couldn't tell who-was-who around here, that *they* could and were watching him. He approached the man with some nervousness.

"Mr. Macroy?"

"Yes?"

"Do you remember me, sir? Saul Zeigler."

"I don't believe I do, Mr. Zeigler. I'm sorry."

Zeigler remembered the voice well. But the face was not the old mask of agony and strain. The mouth was smiling, the dark eyes were friendly.

Zeigler said smoothly, "I'm not surprised you don't remember. I met you only once, a long time ago, and very briefly. Is it all right if I sit down?"

"Of course." The minister made a token shifting to give him more welcoming room on the bench and Zeigler sat down. "This place is sure a surprise to me," said Zeigler.

The minister began to chat amiably about the place. He seemed in every way perfectly rational. Zeigler felt as if he were involved in a gentle rambling conversation with a pleasant stranger. But it wasn't getting him anywhere.

He was pondering how to begin again when Macroy said, "But you are not a patient, Mr. Zeigler. Did you come especially to see me?"

"Yes, I did," said Zeigler, becoming bold. "I am a writer. I was going to write a story about you but I am not allowed to. Well, I wanted to see you, anyway."

"A story?"

"A story about all the good you do here."

"The good *I* do?" said the man.

"I've heard rumors about the good you have done some of these —er—patients."

"That isn't any story." Macroy seemed amused.

"So I'm told. And even if it is, I'm not going to be permitted to write it. I've given my word. Honestly, I won't write it."

The minister was looking at him with a pleasant smile. "I believe you," he said.

Zeigler found himself relaxing. "The truth is, I want in the worst way," he admitted, "to know what it is that you do here. Do you—well, preach to them, sir? I know you are a minister."

"No, sir. I am not. Not any more. And so, of course, I don't preach."

"Then what?"

"Oh, I listen to them. Some of them. Sometimes."

"But that's what the doctors do, isn't it? Do you listen *better?*"

Macroy said, as if to correct him gently, "The doctors here, and all the staff, are just as kind and understanding as they can be."

"Yes. But maybe you listen *differently?*"

Macroy looked thoughtful.

"The point is," pressed Zeigler, "if there is some kind of valuable

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insight that *you* have, shouldn't it be told to the world?"

"I'm not saving the world, Mr. Zeigler," said Macroy dryly. "I'm not *that* crazy. Or that good, either." He was smiling.

Ziegler, who had momentarily forgotten that this man was supposed to be insane, said, "Just a mystery, eh? You don't know yourself?"

"It may be," said Macroy melodiously, "because I am one of them. For I understand some of these sheep."

"In what way do you understand them, sir? I'm asking only for myself. Last time I saw you . . . Well, it has bothered me. I've wished *I* could understand." Zeigler really meant this.

Macroy was looking far away at the pleasant hills beyond the grounds. Then, as if he had reached into some pigeonhole and plucked this out, he murmured, "One hell of a newspaperman."

"*Yes,* sir," said Zeigler, suddenly feeling a little scared.

But Macroy didn't seem perturbed. In a moment he went on pleasantly, "Some of them don't speak, you know. Some, if they do, are not coherent. What man can really understand them? But there are others whom I recognize and I know that I love them."

"That's the secret?" Zeigler tried not to sound disappointed. "Love?"

Macroy went on trying to explain. "They've fallen out of mesh, out of pattern, you know. When they have lost too many of their connections and have split off from the world's ways too far, then they can't function in the world at all."

Elementary, my dear Watson, thought Zeigler.

"But it seems to me," Macroy continued, "that quite a few of *them* didn't do what they were pressured to do, didn't depart from the patterns, because they could sense . . . Oh, they couldn't say how, they couldn't express it. Yet they simply knew that somehow the mark was being missed, and what the world kept pressuring them to do and be just wasn't good enough. Some, poor seekers, not knowing where there was *any* clue, have made dreadful mistakes, have done dreadful things, wicked things. And yet . . ." He seemed to muse.

Zeigler was scarcely breathing. Wicked things? Like murdering your wife, for instance?

"In what way," he asked quietly, "are you one of *them,* sir?"

"Oh." The minister was smiling. "*I* always wanted to be good, too. I was born yearning to be good. I can't remember not listening, beyond and through all the other voices, for the voice of God to speak to me, His child."

He smiled at Zeigler, who was feeling stunned. "I don't mean to preach. I only say that, because I have it—this yearning, this listening, this *hearing* . . ."

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In a moment Zeigler said, rather vehemently, "I don't want to upset you. I don't want to trouble you in any way. But I just don't see . . . I can't understand why you're not back in the pulpit, sir. Of course, maybe you are expecting to leave here, some day soon?"

"I really don't know," said Macroy. "I cannot return to the ministry, of course. Or certainly I don't expect to. I must wait—as I would put it—on the Lord. And it may be that I belong here."

He caught Zeigler's unsatisfied expression. "Excuse me. The obvious trouble is, Mr. Zeigler, that every time they take me into town, as on occasion they do, sooner or later I stop in my tracks and burst into tears. Which wouldn't make me very useful in the pulpit, I'm afraid."

"I guess," said Zeigler, "you've had a pretty rough deal. In fact, I know you've had, but—"

"No, no," said Macroy. "That's not the point. It isn't what anyone did to *me*. It's what *I* couldn't do. And still can't. Of course, here, it is much easier. I can love these people, almost all of them."

"And you can't help trying to help them, can you?" Zeigler said, finding himself irresistibly involved. "Why do you say you don't expect to return to the ministry?"

"Oh, that's very simple," Macroy smiled a little ruefully. "I've explained, it seems to me, to a great many people." He sighed.

"I wish you'd explain it to me," said Zeigler earnestly.

"Then of course I'll try," said Macroy. "But I hope you'll understand that, while I must use certain terms, I don't mean to exhort you to become a Christian, for instance."

"I understand," said Zeigler.

"Christians were given two commandments," Macroy began slowly. "You, too, were given much the same ones, I believe, although in a different form."

"Go on," said Zeigler eagerly.

"The first is to love God, which God knows I do. But I was also committed to the second commandment and that one I could not obey. Oh, I longed to—I even thought that I was obeying. But it isn't, I discovered, a thing that you can force yourself to do. And when that Grace—I mean, when it didn't come to me and I simply was not able—"

"To do what, sir?"

"To love them all."

*"All!"* Zeigler's hair stirred.

"That's what He said." Macroy was calm and sure. The voice was beautiful. "Thy neighbor? Thy enemy?"

And Zeigler saw it, suddenly. "You took it literally!" he burst out.

"Yes."

"But listen," said Zeigler in agitation, "that's just too hard. I mean, that's just about impossible!"

"It was certainly too hard for me," said Macroy, sadly, yet smiling.

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"But—" Zeigler squirmed. "But that's asking too much of *any* human being. How *can* you love all the rotten people in the whole damn world—excuse me, sir. But surely you realize you were expecting too much of yourself."

"So they keep telling me," said Macroy, still smiling. "And since that's my point, too, I know it very well. What I don't feel they quite understand, and it is so perfectly plain to me—" He turned to Zeigler, mind-to-mind. "Suppose you are committed to follow Him, to feed His sheep, to feed His lambs, to be His disciple, which is a discipline, isn't it?—and suppose you cannot make the grade? Then, when you see that you cannot, mustn't you leave the ministry? How could I be a hypocrite, when He said not to be?

"Let me put it in analogy," Macroy continued, warming to argument. "Some young men who wish to become airplane pilots wash out. Isn't that the term? They just can't make the grade. So they may not be pilots. They would endanger people. They may, of course, work on the ground."

Ziegler was appalled. He could not speak.

"So if I have necessarily left the ministry," said Macroy, "that doesn't mean that I may not love as *many* as I can."

Zeigler saw the image of a ray of light that came straight down, vertical and One-to-one. Suddenly there was a cross-piece, horizontal, like loving arms spread out—but *it* had broken. Zeigler's heart seemed to have opened and out of it flooded a torrent of such pity, such affectionate pity, that he thought he was going to cry.

A thousand schemes began to whirl in his brain. Something should be done. This man *should* be understood. Zeigler would storm into the doctor's office. Or he *would* write a story, after all.

Zeigler said, his voice shaking, "Thanks, Mr. Macroy, for talking to me. And may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and shine upon you and give you peace."

Macroy looked up. His look made Zeigler turn and almost run away.

Zeigler, speeding along the walk, was glad no one else had heard him sounding off in singing scripture, like some old rabbi, for God's sakes! Okay, he'd felt like doing it and he had done it and what was it with the human race that you'd better not sound as if you felt something like that?

Maybe that man *is* crazy! But I love him!

Just the same, Zeigler wasn't going back to Doctor Norman's office, not right now. There'd been a reaction, all right, but he didn't care to have it seen all over his face. He'd go see Milly Norman who would give him some coffee and gossip. She always did. He'd take time to cool it. Or figure out how to translate it—

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No, let the man alone, let him stay where he was. Why should Zeigler say one word to help get Hugh Macroy back into the stinking world, which would *kill* him. Sure as hell, it would.

Zeigler was blind and he ran slambang into a man and murmured an apology.

"Hey," said the man, moving to impede him further, "hey, Press, you get any good news outta the nutty preacher, hey, Press?"

"Nothing I can use," said Zeigler bitterly. He started off, but he thought, Love them *all?*

So he stopped and looked experimentally at this stranger. Here was a patient. Zeigler didn't doubt it. A middle-aged, foxy-faced, shambling man, with salted red hair, little beady eyes, and soft repellent lips. A more unlovable sight Zeigler had seldom seen.

Just the same, he said aloud and heartily, "Hey, don't you worry about a thing, old-timer," and then, with his eyes stinging, but telling himself to stop being so much the way he *was,* because he'd never make it, anyhow—suddenly it was too much for him and Zeigler sprinted to his car.

In a little while a man shambled up to where Macroy still sat on the bench under the pepper tree.

"Hey, you the Reverend Macroy?"

"I'm Hugh Macroy. Not a Reverend."

"Well—er—my name's Leroy Chase."

"How do you do, Mr. Chase?"

"Yah. Glad to meetcha. Say, listen, there's something I guess I gotta tell you."

"Sit down," said Macroy cordially.

The man sat down. He put his unkept hands through his graying red hair. "I'm kinda nervous."

"You needn't tell me anything."

"Yah, but I wish—I mean, I want to."

"Well, I'm listening."

"Well, see, it's a kinda long story."

"Go ahead."

"Well, see, I was up Salinas this time and I was hitching back down to L. A."

Macroy had turned his body slightly toward his companion.

"Well," the man said, "I guess you know that hitchers can't be choosers. Hah! So I get this ride and this stupe, he takes California One." Chase's little eyes shifted nervously.

Macroy said, "I see."

"So he dumps me in Big Sur, which is nowhere. So when I finally get another hitch south, I figure I'm lucky. Only trouble is, I find out *this* bird is juiced up pretty strong, and when the fog starts rolling in, believe me, I'm scared. So I want out. So I *get* out. So there I am."

The man was speaking in short bursts. "In that fog, what am I? A ghost or something? Who can see a thumb? Nobody is going to take

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his eye off the white line to look, even. And it gets dark. And what can I do?"

Macroy was listening intently, but he kept silent.

The red-headed man chewed on his own mouth for a moment before he went on. "Well, I got my blanket roll on me, so I figure I'll just bed down and wait out the fog. Why not? So I find this big rock and I nest myself down behind it, where no car is going to plow into me, see? And there I am, dozing and all that. Then there's this car pulls off the road and stops, right ten, fifteen feet in front of me."

The man leaned suddenly away to blow his nose. Macroy looked away, flexed one ankle, then let it relax. He said nothing.

"So I wonder, should I jump up and beg a ride? But it's all so kinda weird, see—white air, you could say?" Chase was gesturing now, making slashes in the air for emphasis. "A man gets out with a flashlight. It's like a halo. And the other party gets out, see. Well, I dunno what's up. I can't see too good. I know they can't see me. I got a gray blanket. I'm practically another rock. And I'm lying low and thinking, why bother?"

The man's speech became slower, his voice a little deeper. "What's the matter with where I am, I think. It's kinda wild out there that night —the white air and all. And I can hear the sea. I always liked listening to the sea, especially by myself, you know?"

Macroy nodded. His eyes were fixed on the man's face.

"Listen, you know what I'm trying to—"

"I'm listening."

"So when this person starts coming along with the flash, I turn my face, so it won't show—"

"Yes," said Macroy, with a strange placidity.

"Then the light goes down on the ground. It don't fall, see? It's just pointing down. And I'm wondering what the hell—excuse me—when . . ." The voice was getting shrill. "My God, I know what she's gonna do! Listen, no man can take a thing like that, for God's sake!"

The man was crying now, crying. "So I think, 'Oh, no, you don't! Not on *me,* you don't!" So I just give a big heave and, Holy God, it's too close! And over she goes! Oh, listen, I never meant—I never—But who could take a thing like that?"

Chase was now on the edge of the bench. "Before I know what I'm doing, I drag my roll and I'm running up the edgy side, north. My life is in my feet, brother, but I gotta get out of there. It's just instinct, see? I could hear you calling—"

"You heard me?" Macroy was looking at the sky.

"Listen. Listen. So I'm about half, three-quarters of a mile away and now here comes this car going south. So I figure to look like I been

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going south the whole while. That way, I never *was* there. And damned if this guy don't stop in the fog and pick me up. Well, I soon find out *he* ain't exactly cold sober, but by this time I don't care, I'm so— Then what does he have to do but stop for you? But you tell him to send help and we just—we just went on by."

Chase slumped. He would fall off the bench in a few moments.

"If you had told me then—" Macroy had shut his eyes.

"Oh, listen, Mister, maybe you're some kind of saint or something but I didn't know, not then. Didn't even know you was a preacher."

"And you had two chances."

"Well, I had—well, three really. But look, nobody coulda said I'd done that on purpose. Maybe manslaughter. Who knows? What I couldn't take was the—was the *motive*. See, it's too damned hilarious. What I couldn't take was the big hah-hah. I mean, *I* knew she never saw me. I know that. *She* wouldn't have done a thing like that. But all I thought at the time was 'Hey, this I don't have to take.' If I would have stopped for one second—but here it comes, outta the night, you could say—Who's going to understand? Who? Because what a screaming howl, right?"

Chase was sobbing. He wasn't looking at Macroy. He sobbed into the crook of his own elbow.

Macroy said musingly, "Yes, it is supposed to be quite funny."

"Listen, what I did do." Chase gathered voice. "This happy-boy, he fin'ly gets into that gas station, and he don't even know what day it is. The message is long gone from his mind. So *I* made the call to the Sheriff. That was the third chance. But I chickened out. I hung up. And I say 'so long' to this happy character and go in the café and when I see the cop car rolling I figure I done all I could and maybe she's okay. I'm praying she's okay. It was the best that I could do." He hiccuped.

They were silent then, in the sunshine that had crept around the tree.

Macroy said in a moment or two, "Why are you here?"

Chase mopped his face with his sleeve. "Oh, I fall apart, see?" he said rather cheerfully. "I practically never been what they'd call 'together.' You talk about chances. I had plenty chances. But not me, I wouldn't stay in school. I coulda even gone to college. But I wouldn't go. So I'm forty years old and I'm crying in my wine, when I can get any, like a baby whining after a shining star, too far—" The man controlled his wailing rhyme abruptly. "Well. So. Now they don't know what else to do with me. So I'm a nut. That's okay."

He relaxed against the back of the bench with a thump. "So now," he spoke quietly, "I'll do anything. I mean clear your name? If you want? What can they do to me?"

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Macroy didn't speak.

"I wish—" said Chase. "Well, anyhow, now you know it wasn't your fault and it wasn't her fault, either. And it wasn't—" He stopped and seemed to listen, anxiously.

"Excuse me," said Macroy. "I was wondering what I would have done. I'm no saint." Macroy turned his face. "And never was."

"But I didn't know you, Mr. Macroy," Chase began to be agitated again. "You got to remember, for all I knew, you mighta killed me."

Macroy said, "I might have. I *think* not. But I wouldn't have laughed."

Chase drew in breath, an in-going sob. "Ah, you don't know me, either. All I *ever* been is a bum, all my life. I never did no good or been no good."

"But you wish you had? You wish you could?"

"God knows!" The cry came out of him, astonished.

"Yes. And I believe you." Macroy bent his head. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That woman was very dear to me. Very dear."

"Don't I believe it?" cried Chase as if his heart had split. "Oh, God, don't I *know!* I heard you calling her. I knew it in your voice." Chase was sobbing. "I remember a thing —what they say in church—I remember. Don't tell me it was good enough, the best I could do. Because it wasn't, and that's what I know."

Chase was on his knees and hanging to the minister's knees, and sobbing. "Oh, listen, listen. I'm sorry. I got a broken heart. Believe me? Please believe me!"

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*a* **HERCULE POIROT** *story by*

**AGATHA CHRISTIE**

*Poirot described the case as "a pleasing little problem, obscure and charming"—which was surely an odd way to characterize the kidnaping of the three-year-old son and heir of one of England's oldest families. But do not walk blithely down the garden path: Hercule Poirot's little gray cells are clicking!*

# AT THE STROKE OF TWELVE

*by AGATHA CHRISTIE*

"YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE FEELings of a mother," said Mrs. Waverly for perhaps the sixth time.

She looked appealingly at Hercule Poirot. My little friend, always sympathetic to motherhood in distress, gesticulated reassuringly.

"But yes, but yes, I comprehend perfectly. Have faith in Papa Poirot."

"The police—" began Mr. Waverly.

His wife interrupted.

"I won't have anything more to do with the police. We trusted to them and look what happened! But I'd heard so much of M. Poirot and the wonderful things he's done that I felt he might be able to help us. A mother's feelings—"

Poirot hastily stemmed the reiteration with an eloquent gesture. Mrs. Waverly's emotion was obviously genuine, but it went strangely with her shrewd, rather hard countenance. When I heard later that she was the daughter of a prominent steel manufacturer of Birmingham who had worked his way up in the world from an office boy to his present eminence, I realized that she had inherited many paternal qualities.

Mr. Waverly was a big, florid, jovial-looking man. He stood with his legs straddled wide apart and looked the country squire type.

"I suppose you know all about this business, M. Poirot?"

The question was almost superfluous. For some days past the paper had been full of the sensational kidnaping of little Johnnie Waverly, the three-year-old son and heir of Marcus Waverly, Esq., of Waverly Court, Surrey, one of the oldest families in England.

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"The main facts I know, of course, but recount to me the whole story, Monsieur, I beg of you. And in detail if you please."

"Well, I suppose the beginning of the whole thing was about ten days ago when I got an anonymous letter —beastly things, anyway—that I couldn't make head or tail of. The writer had the impudence to demand that I should pay him twenty-five thousand pounds—twenty-five thousand pounds, M. Poirot! Failing my agreement, he threatened to kidnap Johnnie.

"Of course I threw the thing into the wastepaper basket without more ado. Thought it was some silly joke. Five days later I got another letter. 'Unless you pay, your son will be kidnaped on the twenty-ninth.' That was on the twenty-seventh.

"Ada was worried, of course, but I couldn't bring myself to treat the matter seriously. Damn it all, we're in England. Nobody goes about kidnaping children and holding them for ransom."

"It is not a common practice, certainly," said Poirot. "Proceed, Monsieur."

"Well, Ada gave me no peace, so —feeling a bit of a fool—I laid the matter before Scotland Yard. They didn't seem to take the thing very seriously—inclined to my view that it was some silly joke. On the twenty-eighth I got a third letter. 'You have not paid. Your son will be taken from you at twelve o'clock noon tomorrow, the twenty-ninth. It will now cost you fifty thousand pounds to recover him.'

"Up I drove to Scotland Yard again. This time they were more impressed. They inclined to the view that the letters were written by a lunatic, and that in all probability an attempt of some kind would be made at the hour stated. They assured me that they would take all due precautions. Inspector McNeil and a sufficient force would come down to Waverly and take charge.

"I went home much relieved in my mind. Yet we already had the feeling of being in a state of siege. I gave orders that no stranger was to be admitted, and that no one was to leave the house.

"The evening passed off without any untoward incident, but on the following morning my wife was seriously unwell. Alarmed by her condition, I sent for Doctor Dakers. Her symptoms appeared to puzzle him. While hesitating to suggest that she had been poisoned, I could see that that was what was in his mind. There was no danger, he assured me, but it would be a day or two before she would be able to get about again.

"Returning to my own room, I was startled and amazed to find a note pinned to my pillow. It was in the same handwriting as the others and contained just three words: 'At twelve o'clock.'

"I admit, M. Poirot, that then I became frightened. Someone in the house was in this—one of the serv-

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ants. I had them all up, blackguarded them right and left. They never split on each other; it was Miss Collins, my wife's companion, who informed me that she had seen Johnnie's nurse slip down the drive early that morning.

"I taxed her with it, and she broke down. She had left the child with the nursery maid and stolen out to meet a friend of hers—a man! Pretty goings on! She denied having pinned the note to my pillow—she may have been speaking the truth, I don't know. I felt I couldn't take the risk of the child's own nurse being in the plot. One of the servants was implicated—of that I was sure.

"Finally I lost my temper and sacked the whole bunch, nurse and all. I gave them an hour to pack and get out of the house."

Mr. Waverly's red face was quite two shades redder as he remembered his just wrath.

"Was not that a little injudicious, Monsieur?" suggested Poirot. "For all you know, you might have been playing into the enemy's hands."

Mr. Waverly stared at him.

"I don't see that. Send the whole lot packing, that was my idea. I wired to London for a fresh lot to be sent down that evening. In the meantime, there'd be only people I could trust in the house—my wife's secretary-companion, Miss Collins, and Tredwell, the butler, who has been with me since I was a boy."

"And this Miss Collins, how long has she been with you?"

"Just a year," said Mrs. Waverly. "She has been invaluable to me, and is also a very efficient housekeeper."

"The nurse?"

"She had been with me six months. She came to me with excellent references. All the same I never really liked her, although Johnnie was quite devoted to her."

"Still, I gather she had already left when the catastrophe occurred. Perhaps, Monsieur Waverly, you will be so kind as to continue."

Mr. Waverly resumed his narrative.

"Inspector McNeil arrived about 10:00. The servants were all gone by then. He declared himself quite satisfied with the internal arrangements. He had various men posted in the Park outside, guarding all the approaches to the house, and he assured me that if the whole thing were not a hoax, we should undoubtedly catch my mysterious correspondent.

"I had Johnnie with me, and he and I and the Inspector went together into a room we call the Council Chamber. The Inspector locked the door. There is a big grandfather clock there, and as the hands drew near to twelve I don't mind confessing that I got as nervous as a cat.

"There was a whirring sound, and the clock began to strike. I clutched Johnnie. I had a feeling a man might drop from the skies. The last stroke sounded, and as it did so, there was a great commotion outside—shouting and running. The

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Inspector flung up the window and a constable came running up.

"'We've got him, sir,' he panted. 'He was sneaking up through the bushes. He's got a whole doping outfit on him.'

"We hurried out on the terrace where two constables were holding a ruffianly-looking fellow in shabby clothes, who was twisting and turning in a vain endeavor to escape. One of the policemen held out an unrolled parcel which they had wrested from their captive. It contained a pad of cotton wool and a bottle of chloroform. It made my blood boil to see it. There was a note, too, addressed to me.

"I tore it open. It bore the following words: 'You should have paid up. To ransom your son will now cost you seventy-five thousand pounds. In spite of all your precautions he has been abducted at twelve o'clock on the 29th as I said.'

"I gave a great laugh, the laugh of relief, but as I did so I heard the hum of a motor and a shout. I turned my head. Racing down the drive towards the South Lodge at a furious speed was a low, long gray car. It was the man driving who had shouted, but that was not what gave me a shock of horror. It was the sight of Johnnie's flaxen curls. The child was in the car beside him.

"The Inspector ripped out an oath.

"'The child was here not a minute ago,' he cried. His eyes swept over us. We were all there—myself, Tredwell, Miss Collins. 'When did you see him last, Mr. Waverly?'

"I cast my mind back, trying to remember. When the constable had called us, I had run out with the Inspector, forgetting about Johnnie.

"And then there came a sound that startled us—the chiming of a church clock from the village. With an exclamation the Inspector pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock. We all ran to the Council Chamber. The clock there marked the hour as ten minutes past. Someone must have deliberately tampered with it, for I have never known it gain or lose before. It is a perfect timekeeper."

Mr. Waverly paused. Poirot smiled to himself and straightened a little mat which the anxious father had pushed askew.

"A pleasing little problem, obscure and charming," murmured Poirot. "I will investigate it for you with pleasure. Truly it was planned *à merveille*."

Mrs. Waverly looked at him reproachfully.

"But my boy," she wailed.

Poirot hastily composed his face and looked the picture of earnest sympathy again.

"He is safe, Madame, he is unharmed. Rest assured, these miscreants will take the greatest care of him. Is he not to them the turkey—no, the goose—that lays the golden eggs?"

"M. Poirot, I'm sure there's only one thing to be done—pay up. I was

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all against it at first—but now! A mother's feelings—" Mrs. Waverly began to sob.

"But we have interrupted Monsieur in his history," cried Poirot hastily.

"I expect you know the rest pretty well from the papers," said Mr. Waverly. "Of course, Inspector McNeil got on to the telephone immediately. A description of the car and the man was circulated all round, and it looked at first as though everything was going to turn out all right. A car, answering to the description, with a man and a small boy, had passed through various villages, apparently making for London. At one place they had stopped, and it was noticed that the child was crying and obviously afraid of his companion.

"When Inspector McNeil announced that the car had been stopped and the man and boy detained, I was almost ill with relief. You know the sequel. The boy was not Johnnie, and the man was an ardent motorist, fond of children, who had picked up a small child playing in the streets of Edenswell, a village about fifteen miles from us, and was kindly giving him a ride. Thanks to the cocksure blundering of the police, all traces have disappeared. Had they not persistently followed the wrong car, they might by now have found the boy."

"Calm yourself, Monsieur. The police are a brave and intelligent force of men. Their mistake was a very natural one. And altogether it was a clever scheme. As to the man they caught in the grounds, I understand that his defense has consisted all along of a persistent denial. He declares that the note and parcel were given to him to deliver at Waverly Court. The man who gave them to him handed him a ten shilling note and promised him another if it were delivered at exactly ten minutes to twelve. He was to approach the house through the grounds and knock at the side door."

"I don't believe a word of it," declared Mrs. Waverly. "It's all a parcel of lies."

"*En verité,* it is a thin story," said Poirot reflectively. "But so far they have not shaken it. I understand also that he made a certain accusation?"

His glance interrogated Mr. Waverly. The latter got rather red again.

"The fellow had the impertinence to pretend that he recognized in Tredwell the man who gave him the parcel. 'Only the bloke has shaved off his mustache.' Tredwell, who was born on the estate!"

Poirot smiled a little at the country gentleman's indignation.

"Yet you yourself suspect an inmate of the house to have been accessory to the abduction."

"Yes, but not Tredwell."

"And you, Madame?" asked Poirot, turning to her.

"It could not have been Tredwell who gave this tramp the letter and parcel—if anybody ever did, which

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I don't believe— It was given him at ten o'clock, he says. At ten o'clock Tredwell was with my husband in the smoking room."

"Were you able to see the face of the man in the car, Monsieur? Did it resemble that of Tredwell in any way?"

"It was too far away for me to see his face."

"Has Tredwell a brother, do you know?"

"He had several, but they are all dead. The last one was killed in the war."

"I am not yet clear as to the grounds of Waverly Court. The car was heading for the South Lodge. Is there another entrance?"

"Yes, what we call the East Lodge. It can be seen from the other side of the house."

"It seems to me strange that nobody saw the car entering the grounds."

"There is a right of way, and access to a small chapel. A good many cars pass through. The man must have stopped the car in a convenient place, and run up to the house just as the alarm was given and attention attracted elsewhere."

"Unless he was already inside the house," mused Poirot. "Is there any place where he could have hidden?"

"Well, we certainly didn't make a thorough search of the house beforehand. There seemed no need. I suppose he might have hidden himself somewhere, but who would have let him in?"

"We shall come to that later. One thing at a time—let us be methodical. There is no special hiding place in the house? Waverly Court is an old place, and there are sometimes 'Priests' Holes' as they call them."

"By Gad, there *is* a Priest's Hole. It opens from one of the panels in the hall."

"Near the Council Chamber?"

"Just outside the door."

*"Voilá!"*

"But nobody knows of its existence except my wife and myself."

"Tredwell?"

"Well—he might have heard of it."

"Miss Collins?"

"I never mentioned it to her."

Poirot reflected for a minute.

"Well, Monsieur, the next thing is for me to come down to Waverly Court. If I arrive this afternoon, will it suit you?"

"Oh, as soon as possible, please, Monsieur Poirot," cried Mrs. Waverly. "Read this once more."

She thrust into his hands the last missive from the kidnaper which had reached the Waverlys that morning and which had sent her posthaste to Poirot. It gave clever and explicit directions for the paying over of the ransom money, and ended with a threat that the boy's life would pay for any treachery.

Poirot detained Mrs. Waverly for a minute behind her husband.

"Madame, the truth, if you please. Do you share your husband's faith in the butler, Tredwell?"

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"I have nothing against him, Monsieur Poirot, and I cannot see how he can have been concerned in this, but—well, I have never liked him—never!"

"One other thing, Madame: can you give me the address of the child's nurse?"

"149 Netherall Road, Hammersmith. You don't imagine—"

"Never do I imagine. Only—I employ the little gray cells. And sometimes, just sometimes, I have a little idea."

Poirot came back to me as the door closed.

"So Madame has never liked the butler. It is interesting, that, eh, Hastings?"

I refused to be drawn. Poirot has deceived me so often that I now go warily. There is always a catch somewhere.

After Poirot had completed an elaborate brushing and combing, we set off for Netherall Road. We were fortunate enough to find Miss Jessie Withers at home. She was a pleasant-faced woman of 35, capable and superior. I could not believe that she could be mixed up in the affair. She was bitterly resentful of the way she had been dismissed, but admitted that she had been in the wrong.

She was engaged to be married to a painter and decorator who happened to be in the neighborhood, and she had run out to meet him. The thing seemed natural enough. I could not quite understand Poirot. All his questions seemed to me quite irrelevant. They were concerned mainly with the daily routine of her life at Waverly Court. I was frankly bored, and glad when Poirot took his departure.

"Kidnaping is an easy job, *mon ami*," he observed, as we hailed a taxi in the Hammersmith Road and ordered it to drive to Waterloo. "That child could have been abducted with the greatest ease any day for the last three years."

"I don't see that that advances us much," I remarked.

"*Au contraire,* it advances us enormously, but enormously! If you must wear a tie pin, Hastings, at least let it be in the exact center of your tie. At present it is at least one-sixteenth of an inch to the right."

Waverly Court was a fine old place and had recently been restored with taste and care. Mr. Waverly showed us the Council Chamber, the terrace, and all the various spots connected with the case. Finally, at Poirot's request, he pressed a spring in the wall, a panel slid aside, and a short passage led us into the "Priest's Hole."

"You see," said Waverly. "There is nothing here."

The tiny room was bare enough —there was not even the mark of a footstep on the floor. I joined Poirot where he was bending attentively over a mark in the corner.

"What do you make of this, my friend?"

There were four imprints close together.

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"A dog," I cried.

"A very small dog, Hastings."

"A pom."

"Smaller even than a pom. A species unknown to the Kennel Club."

I looked at him. His face was alight with excitement and satisfaction.

"I was right," he murmured. "I knew I was right. Come, Hastings."

As we stepped out into the hall and the panel closed behind us, a young lady came out of a door farther down the passage. Mr. Waverly presented her to us.

"Miss Collins."

Miss Collins was about 30 years of age, brisk and alert in manner. She had fair, rather dull hair, and wore pince-nez.

At Poirot's request we went into a small morning room and he questioned her closely as to the servants and particularly as to Tredwell. She admitted that she did not like the butler.

"He gives himself airs," she explained.

They then went into the question of the food eaten by Mrs. Waverly on the night of the 28th. Miss Collins declared that she had partaken of the same dishes upstairs in her sitting room and had felt no ill effects. As she was departing I nudged Poirot.

"The dog," I whispered.

"Ah, yes, the dog!" He smiled broadly. "Is there a dog kept here by any chance, Mademoiselle?"

"There are two retrievers in the kennels outside."

"No, I mean a small dog, a toy dog."

"No—nothing of the kind."

Poirot permitted her to depart. Then, pressing the bell, he remarked to me, "She lies, that Mademoiselle Collins. Possibly I should also in her place. Now the butler."

Tredwell was a dignified individual. He told his story with perfect aplomb, and it was essentially the same as that of Mr. Waverly. He admitted that he knew the secret of the Priest's Hole.

When he finally withdrew, pontifical to the last, I met Poirot's quizzical eyes.

"What do you make of it all, Hastings?"

"What do you?" I parried.

"How cautious you become. Never, never will the gray cells function unless you stimulate them. Ah, but I will not tease you! Let us make our deductions together. What points strike us as being especially difficult?"

"There is one thing that strikes me," I said. "Why did the man who kidnaped the child go out by the South Lodge instead of by the East Lodge where no one would see him?"

"That is a very good point, Hastings, an excellent one. I will match it with another. Why warn the Waverlys beforehand? Why not simply kidnap the child and hold him for ransom?"

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"Because they hoped to get the money without being forced to action."

"Surely it was very unlikely that the money would be paid on a mere threat?"

"Also they wanted to focus attention on twelve o'clock, so that when the tramp man was seized the kidnaper could emerge from his hiding place and get away with the child unnoticed."

"That does not alter the fact that they were making a thing difficult that was perfectly easy. If they do not specify a time or date, nothing would be easier than to wait their chance and carry off the child in a motor one day when he is out with his nurse."

"Ye—es," I admitted.

"In fact, there is a deliberate playing of the farce! Now let us approach the question from another side. Everything goes to show that there was an accomplice inside the house. Point Number One: the mysterious poisoning of Mrs. Waverly. Point Number Two: the letter pinned to the pillow. Point Number Three: the advancing of the clock ten minutes—all inside jobs. And an additional fact that you may not have noticed. There was no dust in the Priest's Hole. It had been swept clean with a broom.

"Now then, we have four people in the house. We can exclude the nurse, since she could not have swept out the Priest's Hole, though she could have attended to the other three points. Four people. Mr. and Mrs. Waverly—Tredwell the butler—and Miss Collins.

"We will take Miss Collins first. We have nothing much against her except that we know very little about her, that she is obviously an intelligent young woman, and that she has only been here a year."

"She lied about the dog, you said," I reminded him.

"Ah, yes, the dog," Poirot gave a peculiar smile. "Now let us pass to Tredwell. There are several suspicious facts against him. For one thing, the tramp declares that it was Tredwell who gave him the parcel in the village."

"But Tredwell can prove an alibi on that point."

"Even then, he could have poisoned Mrs. Waverly, pinned the note to the pillow, put the clock ahead, and swept out the Priest's Hole. On the other hand, he has been born and bred in the service of the Waverlys. It seems unlikely that he should connive at the abduction of the son of the house. It is just not in the picture!"

"Well, then?"

"We must proceed logically—however absurd it may seem. We will briefly consider Mrs. Waverly. But she is rich, the money is hers. It is her money which has restored this impoverished estate. There would be no reason for her to kidnap her son and pay over her own money to herself.

"Her husband, now, is in a differ-

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ent position. He has a rich wife. It is not the same thing as being rich himself—in fact, I have a little idea that the lady is not very fond of parting with her money, except on a very good pretext. But Mr. Waverly, you can see at once, he is *bon viveur.*"

"Impossible," I spluttered. "Kidnap his own son?"

"Impossible?—not at all. Who sends away the servants? Mr. Waverly. He can write the notes, drug his wife, advance the hands of the clock, and establish an excellent alibi for his faithful retainer, Tredwell. Tredwell has never liked Mrs. Waverly. He is devoted to his master, and is willing to obey his orders implicitly.

"There were three of them in it. Waverly, Tredwell, and some friend of Waverly. That is the mistake the police made—they made no further inquiries about the man who drove the gray car with the wrong child in it. He was the third man. He picks up a child in a village nearby, a boy with flaxen curls. He drives in through the East Lodge and passes out through the South Lodge just at the right moment, waving his hand and shouting. They cannot see his face or the number of the car, so obviously they cannot see the child's face either. Then he lays a false trail to London.

"In the meantime, Tredwell has done his part in arranging for the parcel and note to be delivered by a rough-looking gentleman. His master can provide an alibi in the unlikely case of the man recognizing him, in spite of the false mustache he wore. As for Mr. Waverly, as soon as the hullabaloo occurs outside, and the Inspector rushes out, he quickly hides the child in the Priest's Hole, and then follows the Inspector out. Later in the day, when the Inspector is gone and Miss Collins is out of the way, it will be easy enough to drive the child to some safe place in his own car."

"But what about the dog?" I asked. "And Miss Collins lying?"

"That was my little joke. I asked her if there were any toy dogs in the house, and she said no—but doubtless there are some—in the nursery! You see, Mr. Waverly placed some toys in the Priest's Hole to keep Johnnie amused and quiet."

"M. Poirot." Mr. Waverly entered the room. "Have you discovered anything? Have you any clue to where the boy has been taken?"

Poirot handed him a piece of paper.

"Here is the address."

"But this is a blank sheet."

"Because I am waiting for you to write it down for me."

"What the—" Mr. Waverly's face turned purple.

"I know everything, Monsieur. I give you twenty-four hours to return the boy. Your ingenuity will be equal to the task of explaining his reappearance. Otherwise, Mrs. Waverly will be informed of the exact sequence of events."

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Mr. Waverly sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"He is with my old nurse, ten miles away. He is happy and well cared for."

"I have no doubt of that. If I did not believe you to be a good father at heart, I should not be willing to give you another chance."

"The scandal—"

"Exactly. Your name is an old and honored one. Do not jeopardize it again. Good evening, Mr. Waverly. Ah, by the way, one word of advice. Always sweep in the corners!"

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***a Colonel March* "impossible crime" *by***

**JOHN DICKSON CARR**

*"How could he have been murdered? He was all alone on this path. There wasn't anybody within a hundred yards of him . . . No one could have touched him. And yet he was stabbed . . ." Exactly the kind of case for Colonel March, head of D3 Department at Scotland Yard, better known as the Department of Queer Complaints . . .*

# THE LION'S PAW

*by JOHN DICKSON CARR*

UNDER THE WHITE LIGHT OF DAYbreak the beach seemed deserted for a full half-mile toward the headland. The tide was out, showing a muddy slope at the foot of smooth sand. But it had begun to turn, and flat edges of surf moved snakily back toward the beach.

A narrow lane led down to it, between the high and crooked banks which closed it off from the road. Until you were well out on the sands it was impossible even to see Norman Kane's cottage some distance up toward the right. But one landmark showed in a dark wedge against sand and sea. For several hundred yards out into the water a line of rocks ran in humped formation, curved at the end, in a way that suggested the paw of an animal. It seemed to catch at the incoming tide. Bill Stacey knew it at once for the Lion's Paw, and he set off down the lane toward the beach.

It is to Stacey's credit that he still felt moderately cheerful after having just tramped two miles on an empty stomach, carrying a heavy suitcase. Norman Kane had specified the train he was to take from London, and the wayside station at which it would land him. But Kane had said nothing about a certain lack of transport at that hour of the morning.

The prospect of seeing Marion—Kane's niece and secretary—so cheered him that he forgot the matter. He did not know whether Kane knew he was in love with Marion. Norman Kane had for him the slightly amused tolerance with which Kane would naturally regard an easy-going journalist like Stacey. And Stacey, in turn, had concealed

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from a hero-worshipping Marion his belief that Norman Kane was an imposing, dignified, and strenuous crook.

For in his way Kane was a great man, a power in the City and a company-juggler of skill. And he was genuinely fond of Marion, as he was of all his dependents. With his theatricalism went tireless energy; it was only at Dr. Hastings' orders, when he had developed signs of a bad heart, that he had been dragged off for the summer to South Wales.

Heart trouble, Stacey knew, was often the case with these ex-athletes who have run to fat. Kane's worried looks, Marion's worried looks, had disturbed him the last time he saw them. But as he came out on the beach in the morning light, he felt that nothing ever could happen to Kane.

There was the man himself. Even at a distance he recognized Kane's bulky figure, jauntily wrapped in a dark-red bathrobe with white facings, striding along with a towel over his arm, kicking the sand out of his way with rubber slippers. His bathrobe made a spot of color against that lonely shore, where the Lion's Paw stretched out into the tide.

And Kane strode out briskly along the Paw. He was not going to bathe. He was going out along the rocks to dive.

"Here!" Stacey said aloud. Swimming, in that sea, with a bad heart? The mutter of the surf was growing as it drove in, and the farther end of the Paw was already awash.

"Ahoy there!" he yelled. "Kane! Hoy!"

The cry seemed to linger in emptiness across the sands. But it reached Kane, who turned round. He was some fifty yards out on the ridge, but he lifted his towel and waved it.

"Ahoy, my lad!" he bellowed back. "I didn't expect you so early. Come for a dip! The water's fine. Everything is—"

Then it happened.

Stacey never forgot that big, grayish-haired figure, framed against the sea and the dark crook of the Lion's Paw. He was too far away to catch the expression on Kane's face. But Kane's voice died away in a gulp, a puzzled kind of gulp, and his shoulders drew together. For a moment he stood looking at the beach, swaying a little and pressing his arms as though he were cold. Then he pitched forward on his face like a bag of sand.

It was a second or two before Stacey began to run. As he did so he noticed other figures moving on the beach. From some distance away to the right, in the direction of Kane's cottage, he saw Marion running toward him. There was a gleam on her yellow hair; she wore a bathing suit and a beachrobe blown out by the wind. Behind her lumbered Dr. Hastings, in a white linen suit.

But Stacey did not wait for him. He knew instinctively that something had happened to Norman Kane, something worse than a faint.

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Along the top of the Lion's Paw there had been worn a natural sunken path some two feet wide. Picking his way out across this, he found Kane's great bulk wedged into it. Kane's right hand, still clutching the towel, was doubled under him; his left hand lay limply outstretched ahead. Stacey took his pulse, but there was no pulse.

He stood staring down, listening to the slap and swing of the water against the rocks. Heart gone: just like that. At that moment he did not notice the small hole or tear in the back of the dark-red bathrobe, just over the heart. He was too dazed to notice anything more than the fact of death. He hurried back to the beach, where he met Marion and Dr. Hastings.

"Steady," he said, as the girl tried to push past him. "You'd better go out there, Doctor. But I'm afraid he's done for."

None of them moved. He could not quite estimate the effect of his words on Kane's niece. He realized, too, that he had never before seen Marion without her glasses, which had added a businesslike and almost prim touch to her good looks. Over her shoulder towered Dr. Hastings, whose wiry, close-cut hair had a Teutonic look, and his expression a Teutonic heaviness.

"Oh!" said the girl. She was looking at him curiously, and she breathed hard. "Was it—suicide?"

"Suicide?" repeated Stacey, startled. "No. His heart gave out. Why should you think it was suicide?"

"Oh!" said Marion again. She put her hand on his arm and pressed it. "I want to see him. No, I'm quite all right. I hope I can move. I can't think very well."

Dr. Hastings, who seemed about to launch a violent protest, checked himself and pushed past. They went with him to the body, and watched while he made his examination. Then he urged them back toward the beach.

"Look here," Hastings began heavily. He cleared his throat, and tried again. "Yes, he's dead right enough; but possibly not for the reason you think. Do you know if Lionel is up yet, Marion?"

So that fellow was at the cottage, thought Stacey. He had never liked the supercilious and esthetic Mr. Lionel Pell. Norman Kane had once courted Lionel's mother, in the days before she had married the late Mr. Pell; and this seemed to give Lionel the idea that he had some claim on Kane, particularly with regard to sponging.

"Lionel?" repeated Marion. "I—I haven't seen him. I got up and went out for an early swim on the other side of the bay. But I shouldn't think he was up yet. Why?"

"Because," replied Dr. Hastings with his usual directness, "he'll have to get out his car and drive to the village and get the police. I'm afraid this is murder."

The surf was driving in now, with deepening thunder. A wave veered

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against the rocks and flung up a ghostly mane of spray. A cold wind had begun to blow from the south, fluttering Marion's beachrobe. She looked at the doctor with rather blind blue eyes, blinking as though to keep back tears.

"We had better go up to the house," Hastings went on, "and get something to use as a stretcher: he's a weight to move. There are some bad crosscurrents out at this distance when the tide rises, and we don't want him washed out to sea before the police get here."

Then Stacey found his voice.

"The police? Good God, what do you want with the police? His heart —"

"His heart was as sound as yours or mine," said Hastings.

"So," said Marion, "you knew that."

"I should hope I knew it, my dear girl. I happen to be his doctor. Now keep your chin up and let's face the facts. He's been murdered. What little blood there is doesn't show up well against that dark-red bathrobe; but you probably noticed it. And you may have seen the cut in the back of the bathrobe just over the heart."

Stacey put his arm round Marion, who had begun to tremble. He spoke with restraint.

"Look here, Doctor. I don't like to suggest that you're out of your mind, but you might come aside and talk nonsense to me instead of talking it to her. Murdered? How could he have been murdered? He was all alone on this path. There wasn't anybody within a hundred yards of him. You must have seen that for yourself."

"That's true," put in Marion suddenly. "I was sitting up at the top of the beach, up under the bank, getting dry; and I saw him go past. That *is* true, Doctor."

"Yes. It is true. I saw him from the veranda of the cottage," agreed Hastings.

"Then why all this talk about murder?" asked Stacey. "Hold on! Are you saying he was shot with a long-range rifle, or something of the sort? It would have to be very long range. His back was towards the sea when he was hit, and there were several miles of empty water behind him."

"No, I am not saying that."

"Well?"

"He was killed," answered Dr. Hastings slowly, "with some kind of steel point like an old-fashioned hatpin. That's what I think, anyhow. I haven't removed it. And I can't swear to the exact nature of the weapon until the post-mortem."

That afternoon, while the gray rain fell, Superintendent Morgan tramped up to the cottage. He had joined the quiet group assembled inside the veranda—Marion, Dr. Hastings, Lionel Pell, and Bill Stacey sat there. Outside, the sea looked oily and dangerous, as though by its restless movements it were

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about to burst against the cottage. Superintendent Morgan wore a sou'wester and an oilskin cap; the expression of his face was a contrast to his soft voice.

He glared at Dr. Hastings.

"And that's that," he said. "I'm suggesting to you, Doctor, that you did this deliberately."

"You mean," asked Hastings, examining all sides of the matter, "that I killed Mr. Kane?"

"That is not what I mean. I mean, that you deliberately allowed that body to be washed out to sea. Don't worry. We'll find it. Indeed we will. That was an incoming tide, and it's somewhere along the beach." The Superintendent's light eyes opened. His singsong voice was more disturbing than violent. "I say you deliberately let it be carried off so that we shouldn't find out how Mr. Kane was killed."

"Miss Kane and Mr. Stacey," said Hastings shortly, "will tell you I warned them. I wanted to get a stretcher and move him in time. We were too late, that's all. Why shouldn't I want you to find out how he was killed?"

"Because it's an impossible thing you tell us. The man was alone. No one could have touched him. And yet he was stabbed. There must have been a way of doing that. If we had found the body we should have known how it was done."

"Probably you would have," agreed Hastings.

There was an ominous silence, broken by the flat drizzle of the rain. Bill Stacey, sitting beside Marion, did not look at the Superintendent. He found himself more curious about another person, a man who lounged across the veranda near the doorway.

The stranger weighed some 250 pounds and his waterproof made him seem even larger. From under a sodden tweed cap a bland blue eye surveyed the company; and from under a cropped mustache, which might be sandy or gray, there projected a large-bowled pipe, at which he seemed to be sniffing. Stacey had heard the Superintendent address him as Colonel March. Colonel March listened, but so far had said nothing.

"Meantime," said Superintendent Morgan, taking out a notebook, "there are more queernesses here. I want to hear about them, if you please. Miss Kane!"

Marion glanced up briefly. She had been holding herself in well, Stacey thought, and preserving her blank, "secretarial" manner.

"We've heard a good deal hereabouts," Morgan went on, "about Mr. Kane and his bad heart. You tell us you knew he didn't have a bad heart at all."

"I guessed it. So did Dr. Jones in the village, I think."

"Then why did he keep on saying he had?" demanded Morgan.

"I—I don't know."

"Then tell me this, miss. When you first heard this morning that

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Mr. Kane was dead, you asked whether it was suicide. Why did you ask that?"

"I—"

"Truth, miss!"

"I've been worried about him," answered Marion. "He's been threatening suicide, if you must know. And he's been acting queerly."

Lionel Pell intervened. Lionel's way of speaking, which sometimes made him as unintelligible as a gramophone running down, now became almost clear. His long legs were outthrust; and his usual expression of supreme indifference was now replaced by one almost helpful. He sat back, long of nose and jaw, and laid down his pronouncement.

"The word, I believe, is 'childish,'" he decided. "The poor old boy—Norman, of course—has been playing with toys. Tell them about the cardboard soldiers, Marion. And the air rifle."

Marion gave him an almost malevolent look.

"There's nothing very childish about the air rifle. It's a powerful one, hardly a toy at all. You've used it yourself. But I admit I don't understand about the soldiers.

"You see," she appealed to Morgan, "only the night before last my uncle came home with a huge box of cardboard soldiers. He bought them in Cardiff. They were gaudily painted, each of them five or six inches high. In the bottom of the box was a wooden cannon, painted yellow, that fired a hard rubber ball. My uncle went back to his study and unwrapped them, and set them all up on the table."

At this point, Stacey noticed, the man called Colonel March stirred and glanced across with sudden interest. They all saw it; it brought a new atmosphere of tension. Morgan looked at her with quick suspicion.

"Did he, Miss Kane? Did he seem to be—er—enjoying himself?"

"No," she replied quite seriously "He looked ill. Once he came out, for no reason at all, and begged my pardon."

"Miss Kane, do you mean your uncle was insane?"

Dr. Hastings interposed. "Norman Kane," he said, "was one of the sanest men I ever met."

"Now I will tell you something myself," said Superintendent Morgan. "He 'begged your pardon,' you say. You talk of suicide. I have heard of your Mr. Kane from my cousin who tells me that your Mr. Kane was not much better than a swindler. My cousin says his companies are crashing, and that he was going to be prosecuted. Is *that* a reason for suicide? I think it is."

"I know nothing of my uncle's private affairs," said Marion. And yet it was, Stacey felt, the thing she had been fearing. Marion wore a print frock, and she seemed less like a secretary than a nurse—a nurse at the bedside of a patient who she had determined should not die.

"Is that, I ask you, a reason for suicide?"

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"It may be a reason for suicide," snapped Dr. Hastings. "But it won't explain how a man could run himself through the back at an angle his hand couldn't possibly reach—and in full sight of three witnesses as well."

"Murder or suicide, it is still impossible!"

"And yet the man is dead."

"One moment," said Colonel March.

It was an easy, comfortable voice, and it soothed tempers frayed by rain and fear. His presence was at once authoritative and comfortable, as though he invited them to a discussion rather than an argument; and his amiable eye moved round the group.

"It's not my place to butt in," he apologized, "but there are one or two things here that are rather in my line. Do you mind, Superintendent, if I ask a question or two?"

"Glad," said Morgan fervently. "This gentleman," he explained, "is the head of D3 Department at Scotland Yard. He is down here—"

"—on not a very exciting errand," said Colonel March sadly. "A matter of a curious thief who steals only green candlesticks, and therefore comes under the head of our special investigation department. Excuse me: Miss Kane, two days before he died your uncle bought a box of cardboard soldiers. Will you get me that box of soldiers now?"

Without a word Marion got up and went into the cottage. Dr. Hastings looked up suddenly, as though on the defensive.

"We have also heard," Colonel March continued presently, "that he bought an air rifle. I think you used that air rifle, Mr. Pell?"

Lionel sat up. With the Superintendent he had been friendly and helpful. With Colonel March he had adopted his usual indifference, the air of ease and right with which he (at twenty-three) had called Kane "Norman" and conferred a favor by accepting loans.

"I *have* used it," he said. "It was not my property. Are you under the impression that our late good host was killed by being shot with one of those microscopic pellets out of a toy air rifle? Or, for that matter, by a rubber ball out of a toy cannon?"

"Where was the air rifle kept?"

You could not shake Lionel's placidity.

"I believe I kept it in my room. Until last night, that is. Then I lent it to Marion. Hadn't you better ask her?"

Marion returned in a few moments with a large and bright-colored box which she handed to Colonel March. She seemed to feel that her name had been mentioned; for she looked quickly between Lionel and Bill Stacey. Colonel March opened the box, sniffing at his pipe.

"And yet," he said, with a sharpness which made Stacey uneasy, "the rubber ball is gone. Where, I wonder, is the air rifle now? You borrowed it, Miss Kane?"

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"Look here—" interrupted Dr. Hastings, with an oddly strained expression. He got up from his chair and sat down again.

"Yes, I borrowed it," Marion answered. "Why? Didn't I tell you? I took it out with me when I went to swim this morning, at the other side of the cottage. I shot a few bottles and things, and then put it down. When I came back to this side of the beach I must have forgotten it."

She stared at them, her eyes widening.

"I'm afraid it'll be ruined, in all this rain. I'm sorry. But what of it? Is it important?"

"Miss Kane," said Colonel March, "do you usually go out for a swim as early in the morning as that?"

"No. Never. Only I was horribly worried about my uncle. I couldn't sleep."

"You were fond of him?"

"Very fond of him," said Marion simply. "He had been very good to me."

Colonel March's expression seemed to darken and withdraw. It was as expressionless as his ancient cap or his ancient pipe; and he said nothing. But he closed the box of soldiers with great care, and beckoned the Superintendent to one side.

Late that afternoon a body was washed up on the shore two miles below Barry Island. And Marion Kane was detained for questioning at the police station, as a prelude to formal detention on a charge of murder.

Stacey spent one of the worst nights of his life. He told himself that he must keep calm, that he must resist the impulse to telephone wildly for solicitors, invade the police station, and generally make a nuisance of himself. He realized, wryly, that he was not a strong, silent man like Dr. Hastings. In difficulties he wanted to do something about them, if only to adopt the dubious course of hitting somebody in the eye.

Things would be all right, he assured himself. Kane's own solicitor was coming from London, and the police were fair. But this very feeling that the police were fair disturbed him worst of all. After a sleepless night at the cottage he dozed off at dawn, and came downstairs at ten o'clock. Lionel Pell was coming up the veranda steps with a newspaper. It was still raining, and so dark that Dr. Hastings had lighted the oil lamps in the living room.

"Here's their case," said Lionel, holding up the newspaper. "Our Superintendent has been talking indiscreetly. It's plastered all over the world."

"Their case? Their case against—?"

Stacey had to admit that his opinion of Lionel had changed. Lionel had no affectations now; under press of trouble he was only lanky and awkward and human.

"Well, they don't mention her name, of course. She's not officially under arrest. It's very carefully

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worded. But they appear to have found that air rifle buried in the sand at the top of the beach under the bank. They found it at the exact place where Marion says she was sitting when old Norman fell, and in an almost direct line with the Lion's Paw."

Against the lamplight from one of the living-room windows appeared Dr. Hastings' head. It was only a silhouette with wiry cropped hair, but they saw his knuckles bunch on the window sill.

"*I* don't know anything about it," Lionel urged hastily. "I was in bed and asleep when it happened. But you recall, Bill, that until you came well out on the beach yesterday morning you couldn't see Marion at all. You were in the little lane. Dr. Hastings couldn't see her either. He was on the veranda here, and this cottage is set well back behind the line of the bank.

"If Norman were shot in the back, particularly with a weapon like that, he wouldn't feel it the moment he was hit. People don't, they say. He would hear a hail from Bill Stacey, and turn round. Then he would fall forward with the weapon in his heart—"

From the window Hastings uttered a kind of growl.

"The weapon?" he said. "As a matter of academic interest, will you tell me just what an air rifle has to do with this, anyhow?"

"Oh, come! You won't be able to dodge responsibility like that, Doctor," said Lionel, who always dodged responsibility.

"Dodge—?"

"Yes. It's your fault. You were the one who suggested that the wound was made by a point and shaft like an old-fashioned hatpin?"

"Well?"

"Those air rifles, you know; they're pretty powerful. Hardly like a toy at all. But sometimes the lead pellets stick in the barrel and clog it. So as a rule the makers give you a very thin light rod to clean the barrel with. If you cut off about three-quarters of the rod, and sharpen the other end to a needle point, you would have a short missile that could be fired with very damaging force in the ordinary way."

There was a silence, except for the noise of sea and rain. Stacey walked to the end of the veranda.

"I've heard rot before," he said, as though making a measured decision. "But never in my life . . . Do you realize that there's no air rifle powerful enough to carry any kind of missle with enough force to kill at a distance of well over fifty yards?"

"Yes, I know," admitted Lionel. "But you see the trouble?"

"No, I don't."

"It's just plausible," said Lionel. "I don't believe it. It only worries me."

"I want my hat," said Dr. Hastings suddenly. "Where's my hat? This can't go on; I won't have it. I'm going down to the police station and

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tell them what really happened."

Outside the cottage there was a rustle of footsteps, stumbling footsteps in the gloom. It was so dark that they could barely see the two persons who came up the steps, but Dr. Hastings picked up a lamp inside the window and held it so that the light fell on Colonel March and Marion Kane.

Colonel March was wheezing a little, but as bland as ever. Marion's expression could not be read. There was relief in it, and disillusionment, and even peace; despite the signs of recent emotion, she was smiling.

"I should like a cigarette, please, Bill," she said. Then she took his arm. "Thank heavens for an ordinary decent human being."

"The Superintendent and I," said Colonel March, "have come to apologize. Of course, we did what we did entirely with Miss Kane's consent. We have concocted a fiction and kept on the lee side of libel. We have set a trap and heard it snap. We have given you all, I fear, a bad night. But it was the only way we could bring the corpse back to tell his own story . . . You had better come up now, Mr. Kane."

It was a very muddy, shamefaced, and glowering corpse who walked up the steps behind Superintendent Morgan. Norman Kane, whose heart had stopped beating more than twenty-four hours ago, was now very much alive; and looked as though he wished he weren't.

Norman Kane's gray-haired dignity did not sustain him. He seemed undecided whether or not to hide behind Superintendent Morgan. For a moment he stood opening and shutting his hands. Then he caught sight of Dr. Hastings standing in the window, holding up the lamp.

"You traitor," he roared, and flung himself at the doctor.

"He was dead," insisted Stacey. "His heart had stopped; I'll swear to that. How did he manage it?"

On a clear, cool morning after the rain, Marion, Stacey, and Colonel March stood on the beach looking at a new tide. Colonel March frowned.

"You had better hear the story," he said. "Kane was wrong in nearly everything; he was wrong in the way he flared out against Dr. Hastings. Hastings is his friend, and only tried to help him when his pig-headed piece of deception would have been discovered in two minutes.

"You will already have guessed the fact which Miss Kane feared: Norman Kane was heading for a bad financial smash. It might not necessarily mean prison, but it would mean ruin and penury. Kane did not like such embarrassments. So he planned to stage a fake death and disappear, with a good sum laid by. Other financiers have been known to do it, you know," Colonel March added dryly.

Marion tossed a pebble at the water and said nothing.

"He was going to 'die' and have

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his body washed out to sea—never to be found," the Colonel went on. "But he did not want either the stigma of suicide or the prying investigation of a murder. So, with the assistance of Dr. Hastings, he arranged to die of heart failure on the Lion's Paw. There had to be an independent witness there to swear to his death—you, Mr. Stacey.

"You were summoned for that purpose. Hastings had to be there to corroborate you. Then Hastings would shepherd you to the cottage, hundreds of yards away, as the tide rose. Kane, a supremely powerful swimmer, could let himself into the water, swim out and round to the headland, and disappear.

"So for a long time he gabbled everywhere about his weak heart. But he would not listen to Hastings, who told him it was very risky. Miss Kane knew that his heart was not weak. Even the village doctor knew it. If Kane, therefore, suddenly dropped dead of a complaint he did not have, there would be a strong suspicion of fraud at the start. It was altogether a foolish plan. Even so it might have gone through if, on the very morning chosen for the 'death' Miss Kane had not decided to get up for an early swim.

"She was not accustomed to getting up early, as she told us. Norman Kane and Dr. Hastings thought they would have the whole beach to themselves at that hour—except for their special witness, a young man of —er—unsuspicious nature."

Stacey looked at him glumly.

"For 'unsuspicious,'" he said, "read 'imbecile.' Very well; but I was in full command of what faculties I have, Colonel. I know when a man is dead. And I tell you his heart had stopped."

"I beg your pardon," beamed Colonel March. "His heart had not stopped. But his *pulse* had stopped."

"His pulse?"

"You will recall how he was lying. Flat on his face, with his right hand doubled under him, but his left hand stretched out invitingly. He was also lying wedged in a kind of trough; and you know his great weight. To move him and get at his heart would be difficult and awkward. You would never try to do it, with that limp hand stretched out towards you. You would automatically feel the pulse at his wrist. And there was no pulse."

"But how the dickens can you stop a pulse? It's the same as a heart."

"You stop it," said Colonel March, "by means of a small, hard, rubber ball, such as the little one supplied with the toy cannon in the box of soldiers. It is a good trick, which was exhibited before a group of doctors in London some time ago —and it worked. At the same time it is so simple that I suggest you try it for yourself. Kane, of course, got it from Dr. Hastings.

"The small rubber ball is placed under the armpit. The arm is pressed hard against the side; the flow of blood is cut off; and the man is

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'dead.' Kane lay with his upper arm against his side, but with his lower arm from elbow to wrist extended for your inspection. That is all.

"Even so, the whole plan almost crashed, because Miss Kane unexpectedly appeared on the scene. You, Mr. Stacey, had found the body and announced death from heart failure. But Hastings knew that this would never do. Miss Kane strongly suspected that the weak heart was a sham.

"If the body had already been swept out to sea, if she had come on the scene only afterwards, she might have wavered. She might have been uncertain. She might have thought it was suicide, which they tried to conceal from her under a mask of heart failure. But there was the body. If something were not done quickly, she would have insisted on examining it. And it would never do for her to find a living man."

Marion nodded. She was still shaken from the after-effect of a somewhat bitter hoax.

"I certainly should have!" she said. "Only the doctor—"

"Diverted your attention. Exactly. He is an ingenious fellow, Hastings; and no wonder he was upset that morning. He diverted it in the only possible way, with a sudden clap of violence and murder. He drew you hastily back to the beach so that Kane should not overhear. He shocked you out of your wits, which made it easy for him to put ideas into your mind.

"Remember you never actually *saw* any trace of a wound or a weapon. All you saw was a very minute tear in the back of the bathrobe, where it had been skagged on a sharp stone.

"That tear, he admits, put the idea into his mind while he was making his 'examination.' To account for such a very small puncture, and such a complete absence of blood, he had to think of some weapon corresponding to that description; so he postulated something like an old-fashioned hatpin. He could have said it was suicide, of course. But he knew that a man could neither stab himself in the back at that angle, in the presence of witnesses, nor press such a weapon so far into the flesh as to be invisible. Whereas it was just possible that a thin blade might have been projected or fired by a murderer. It was altogether *too* possible. Dr. Hastings had acted wildly and unwisely on the spur of the moment, to prevent the discovery of his friend's hoax; but he must have grown somewhat ill when he saw the case we spun out of a completely harmless air rifle."

Colonel March smiled apologetically.

"It was a very weak case, of course," he said, "but we had to bring the corpse back. We had to have something—suggestive, but noncommittal and nonlibelous—to stare at Kane from the Welsh newspapers. It had to be done before he got away to the Continent, or we

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might never have caught him. The discovery of a drowned body, washed up at Barry, was very helpful; it aided the illusion with which we might snare Kane. The matter was suggested to Miss Kane, who agreed . . ."

"Agreed?" cried Marion. "Don't you see I *had* to know whether . . . I have looked up to him all my life. I had to know whether he would cut and run just the same if he thought I might be hanged for his murder."

"Which he did not do," said Colonel March. "Mr. Norman Kane, I think, has had a refreshing shock which will do him no harm. I should like to have seen him when he crept into town last night, when he found that he was not dead of heart failure and washed out to sea but that his murdered body had been found and his niece was accused of having killed him. No wonder he burst out at Hastings. But what did he do? He must have realized, Miss Kane, that this charge against you would sooner or later be shown as nonsense; and yet he came back. It was a decent thing to do, as decent as the thing you did yourself. I think it likely that, if he faces his difficulties now, he will save himself as he thought he was saving you."

---

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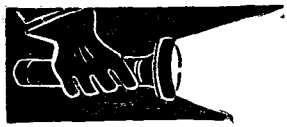

# BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

## *recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER*

As usual, the two most prestigious awards in the crime field went to different novels as Best-of-1966. In London, the Crime Writers Association honored Lionel Davidson's A LONG WAY TO SHILOH (Gollancz; in the U.S. titled THE MENORAH MAN, Harper & Row, $5.95). In New York, Mystery Writers of America gave its Edgar to Nicolas Freeling's THE KING OF THE RAINY COUNTRY (Harper & Row, $4.50). Runners-up for MWA: Dick Francis' ODDS AGAINST (Harper & Row, $4.95), Ngaio Marsh's KILLER DOLPHIN (Little, Brown, $4.95), Donald E. Westlake's THE BUSY BODY (Random, $3.95); for CWA, John Ball's IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT (Gollancz; in the U.S., Harper & Row, $3.50), which won MWA's Edgar for first novel last year, and John Bingham's THE DOUBLE AGENT (not yet published here).

★★★★★ **THE LAST ONE LEFT, *by John D. MacDonald*** (Doubleday, $4.95)

A suspense masterpiece, compelling as puzzle, as thriller, and as serious novel; one of the longest crime stories of modern times, and absolutely unpadded.

★★★★ **THE GIFT SHOP, *by Charlotte Armstrong*** (Coward-McCann, $4.95)

Another of Miss A's magical Yellow Brick Roads: wildly unlikely, consummately suspenseful, and delightfully human.

★★★★ **A THRILL A MINUTE WITH JACK ALBANY, *by John Godey*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)

Fine roaring adventure-farce of an actor forced to impersonate a mobland killer—funniest recent thriller-not-by-Donald-Westlake.

★★★★ **WINTERWOOD, *by Dorothy Eden*** (Coward-McCann, $4.95)

Conceivably overfamiliar in materials, but so extremely well done as to stand easily in first place among the year's gothicas.



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★★★★ **ROSEMARY'S BABY, *by Ira Levin*** (Random, $4.95)

Levin's second novel (14 years after his brilliant first) is a powerful, unpredictable, ultimately shocking tale of diabolism.

MWA's Edgar for the year's best short story went to Rhys Davies' *The Chosen One* (*New Yorker*), which will appear in my next BEST DETECTIVE STORIES. Runners-up: Algis Budrys' *Master of the Hounds* (*Saturday Evening Post*); Robert L. Fish's *The Hochmann Miniatures* (*Argosy*), in the last MWA anthology (and also to appear soon expanded as a novel); and Charlotte Armstrong's *The Splintered Monday* (EQMM), to appear in the next EQ collection.

★★★★ **ONE OF US WORKS FOR THEM, *by Jack D. Hunter*** (Dutton, $4.95)

Fast, tight, hard novel of security insecurity in Germany, with a beautifully twisted and pointed plot.

★★★★ **MISSION IN BLACK, *by Gordon Cotler*** (Random, $4.95)

Another American spy novel far above average in writing and plotting, with vivid Caribbean locale.

★★★ **SUCH A GORGEOUS KID LIKE ME, *by Henry Farrell*** (Delacorte, $4.95)

Grand rowdy bawdy comedy of crime and sociology—to be approached only by those who do not fear lusty (and well-used) foul language.

★★★ **THE DAMSEL, *by Richard Stark*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

Hardcover debut of a notable paperback practitioner of toughness: solid professional thriller of professional crime.

★★★ **THE LEGACY LENDERS, *by Harold Q. Masur*** (Random, $3.95)

10th of the far too infrequent cases of lawyer Scott Jordan: enviably fast, fascinating, tricky.

Other MWA Edgars: *Best American first novel:* Ross Thomas' THE COLD WAR SWAP (Morrow, $3.95). *Best fact-crime:* Gerold Frank's THE BOSTON STRANGLER (New American Library, $5.95). *Best juvenile mystery:* Kin Platt's SINBAD AND ME (Chilton, $4.50). *Best motion picture:* HARPER (Warner Bros.), screenplay by William Goldman from Ross Macdonald's THE MOVING TARGET (Knopf, 1949; now available in Macdonald's ARCHER IN HOLLYWOOD, Knopf, $6.95, or as Pocket Books 50218, retitled HARPER, 50¢).



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**PART TWO (*conclusion*)**
**of the *NEWEST* suspense-detective story by**
**CORNELL WOOLRICH**

*In last month's installment Stephen Duane registered in a hotel under his true name and waited in his room for a girl to join him in the pretense of being caught* in flagrante delicto—*caught "in the act" by his wife, her lawyer, the hotel detective, and a photographer. Stephen Duane didn't like it, but he had no choice.*

*The first part of the story ended with the discovery that the girl had died in the bed during the break-in and photographing. "And the next thing Steve knew, the door slammed shut and he was alone and half dressed in a hotel room, with a dead stranger on the bed to explain away."*

*The unknown girl had been murdered, and Steve Duane was in the greatest peril of his life . . . Now finish this fascinating story by the one and only Cornell Woolrich . . .*

# DIVORCE—NEW YORK STYLE *(conclusion)*

*by CORNELL WOOLRICH*

The room they had put Duane in looked like an office. It was that in every sense of the word, because any room used to transact business is an office. And investigating a sudden death is a business. Even though it's non-commercial, non-profit-making, it's still a business. The business of the police.

This business office was in the precinct house that had jurisdiction over the area in which the death had occurred; the office was not chic—it was shabby, smudgy, and shopworn. But then neither is death chic; it too is shabby, smudgy, and shopworn. So the market place matched the commodity.

There were filing cabinets around three walls—sheet-iron baked an ugly olive-green, which even when it was new must have been bilious-conjuring, and now it wasn't new any more. Each cabinet had a red-edged label slotted into the front, but all these had on them were capital index-letters, two or three to a bracket, in the usual alphabetical order. A couple of letters, X and Z, had been left out, probably because they were too seldom used.

What lay in back of the index-



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letters was inscrutable—a secret of police bookkeeping. The only sign that the letters were ever used at all —and that sign was not conclusive —was that someone in a hurry had once forgotten to pat down one of the inside cards even with the rest, and the closing of the cabinet drawer had caught a corner of it, bent it over, and held it sticking out in a little white triangle. It might have happened yesterday or it might have happened a year before, but no one had ever bothered to straighten it out. They all seemed to go to that particular cabinet for some other card, and they didn't have time for that one.

A dog-eared file card, carelessly left that way, even though somebody's life blood may have once been inscribed on it. What is life but a dog-eared file card anyway, pulled out, pushed back again, by some big anonymous thumb.

Duane was sitting at a battered table. He was in that nebulous classification known to the police as "Mind if we ask you a few questions?" This was far short of any state of actual detention. And yet at the same time it was definitely not the status designated as "Well, that'll be all; you can go now." He hadn't tried getting up and leaving, but he had a pretty good idea that if he had, it would have been brought home to him, tactfully but firmly, that that was not the status he was in. The bottommost, of course, of all these echelons was the unwelcome and least sought-after (by the police themselves) beginning: "Lady, we're pretty busy down here; maybe if you ask them yourself, in a nice way, they'll tone down the volume of their TV set."

But the top one of all, the peak, the dread climax, the final category beyond which there was no going, seldom used and seldom wasted, was wordless: a rough-armed shove into a chair and an incisive jerk of a thumb to a stenographer to begin shorthanding a confession.

Repeat: the dread climax, the culmination—a wordless shove onto a chair and a thumb-jerked signal to a stenographer to start shorthanding a confession.

There was another man sitting at the table with Duane. He was in unmarked clothing, of course, and what his exact rank was Duane couldn't tell, never having been an aficionado of these processes until today. (And not today, either.) But since all the verbal messages and asides and all the written reports and memos that were floating around the place seemed to converge and land on this other man, it was a good guess that he was high up in the investigation. He was the crux of the proceedings—even Duane's uninitiated eye could perceive that.

Both of them had cigarettes smoking, but each in a different way, each indicative of his mood and present situation. Duane's was

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held tautly in his hand, rising jaggedly every few moments. The other man was smoking calmly, abstractedly, almost like an absent-minded schoolteacher going over his pupil's homework, letting it balance across the rim of the table until most of it was wasted.

Duane had a nagging impression that his table-mate had joined him in smoking (in fact, he was the one who had encouraged it) in an artful attempt to make him feel relaxed, to put him at ease (and by the same token, off-guard), in a sort of simulated camaraderie that was not only less than skin-deep but was ready to vanish altogether from one moment to the next at the first wrong word Duane said. In any case, as a sedative, the cigarette wasn't working at all. He didn't like where he was, and he didn't like why he was where he was. And though the sum-total of his physical exertion since he'd been sitting here was simply to uncross and recross his legs, his heartbeat felt like someone knocking on a door.

The homicide man spoke unusually good English. Duane had an idea he'd gone to night school to acquire it. But his face didn't go with it. They don't hand those out at night school. His looked like that of a bricklayer whose face had once got caught between two of his own bricks. And left mortared-in overnight. At the same time he spoke like an angel—an angel with a Princeton degree.

"Wasn't there any other way to do it?" he was asking. "Couldn't you have avoided such a charade, such a travesty, which in the end fools no one? Everyone's in on it—you, your wife, both lawyers, and even the court that hears the evidence must smell a rat; what it amounts to is collusion of the worst sort. I realize that under our present New York State law, proven adultery is the only admissible grounds, but then why couldn't you have gone out of town for it instead? To Reno or Juarez or one of those places? We're just simple cops down here, and it's not our detail, but I have no sympathy for anyone who twists around the law that way."

Duane squirmed guiltily and turned even paler. "She was the one bringing the action," he explained defensively. "And she didn't want to leave New York. She had somebody else interested in her, and she was afraid she'd lose him if she went away. There's an old saying: 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder—for somebody else.' "

"Fine bunch of cynics," growled the police officer, shaking his head disgustedly. "I believe we should keep our bargains, good or bad, when it comes to marriage. And it's for people like you we're supposed to risk our necks and—"

He didn't finish, but went back to his own stamping grounds, while Duane looked down boyishly.

"And you say you never saw this girl before?"

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"I never set eyes on her before in my life until she knocked at the hotel-room door."

"And you didn't know her name either?"

"We didn't exchange names."

"You got into a bed together, but you didn't exchange names," the policeman commented drily.

Duane looked down again. I didn't know she was going to die, he felt like saying, but he thought he'd better not; it sounded too flippant, and he didn't feel that way about it. Then he thought he should have said it after all—at least, it would have shown he hadn't expected her to die, and therefore wasn't responsible for it. But by that time it was too late to say it.

"Would you care to know her name now?"

Duane gave a fatalistic shrug.

"Her name was Rose Metz, but she co-responded under the name of Rose Metcalf." He shook his head dolefully. "Apparently even in her line of work a fancier name is considered an advantage."

"Don't you think it's more likely that she had too much respect for her family and her people to want to drag down their good name?"

There had been a verbal trap there, he supposed. Not a very deep or devious one, just a surface attempt to elicit recognition or surprise on his face. Which of course wasn't forthcoming, because Duane had genuinely never heard the girl's name before.

The homicide man leafed through a report which had already been there on the desk before him when Duane first came in. Apparently this was not a first reading, but a refresher to confirm what he had read the first time. Apparently also, it was a medical report.

"There's no question of a coronary or any other natural cause. She died of a specific. Its name is nitrobenzene, and it was ingested through the skin, according to the Medical Examiner. Even a few drops on the skin are enough to bring on sudden prostration and sometimes death. Which in this case was not observable because she was already lying quiet in the bed beside you.

"One of the nervous starts following the flash lights might, in her case, have been the act of death occurring, and therefore passed without notice. The M.E. says all the classic symptoms were found to be present: the blood had turned chocolate color, the face gray, the fingernails dark purple, the organs had an odor of bitter almonds, and a few other things that require a pretty strong stomach to listen to, so we don't need to go into them here. The chemical formula for this beauty is $C_6H_5NO_2$, and it destroys the oxygen-carrying red blood cells. The technical form of death is therefore respiratory paralysis, or in everyday talk, asphyxiation." And in an admiring aside to himself he said, "He's got everything down, this guy."

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Sounds almost too dramatic to be true, Duane thought, but he didn't say so aloud.

The homicide man seemed to read his mind. Or maybe his own progression of thoughts had followed the same course, so they had come out at the same place. "Death can be very dramatic," he said, "Especially quick death like this in a young body."

He slid the report aside. "All right, we know the medical cause. Let's go on from there. Now, there are two possibilities: either it was self-administered, or it was administered by someone else. We call the first suicide. We call the second murder."

What is this, Duane wondered, again to himself. A class in police semantics?

"In the first, the act destroys the person who commits the act, so there is nothing left. In the second, the act destroys someone who is *not* the person who commits the act. That's where we come in—to find the administerer and pass him or her on for punishment."

Duane noticed the inclusion of the feminine pronoun. But the only other woman participating in the scene or present at it had been his wife Dolly. A blurred question mark formed in his mind, then faded away again. Still, it might have been just a form of speech. Dolly had remained standing near the door the whole time—he remembered that much; she hadn't come any farther into the room from first to last.

"There were seven of you in the room all told at one time or another, from time of your check-in to time of police arrival. But not concurrently, not all at the same time."

He told them off with the end of a pencil against the tips of his fingers, one by one.

"There were: Arnold Kellgard, your attorney. Joey Guzman, the room-service waiter who brought the drinks. Your wife, Dolly Duane. Kevin Cronin, *her* attorney. Bill Moyer, the hotel security-officer. And Stan Roark, the photographer—the kind of a guy who photographs girls on the half shell for calendars and post cards not meant to be sent through the mail.

"And you," he concluded neatly.

"You are the only one," he went on to point out, "who was in the room from start to finish. You run through the thing from beginning to end. From your taking the room until your call to the police."

"You make me feel good," Duane couldn't help mumbling morosely.

"And another thing. You are the only one of the seven who was alone with the girl at any time, without anyone else being present. This happened twice, according to our reconstruction. For a very considerable stretch of say, fifteen minutes between the time you admitted her to the room and the time the fake raiders 'broke in.' And again between the time you called

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us and the time we got there. But by that time she was dead, so we won't count that one. Although you might have had a chance to dispose of things, such as whatever was left of the nitrobenzene and whatever had been used to carry it in—whatever traces there were around."

"I didn't even know *what* had been used, at that time," Duane protested with unconvincing logic, "so how could I have disposed of whatever it had been carried in? I wouldn't have known it even if I saw it."

"What went on during those fifteen minutes you were alone with her the first time?"

"I told you."

"Tell it again then." It was said without any hostility. But he was looking for variations to creep in, Duane knew.

"She said, 'Are you the gentleman?' I offered to wait in the hall for her to get ready. Instead she went into the bathroom, locked the door on the inside, got ready, and came out. I offered her a drink. She didn't take one."

"She didn't; right," the homicide man confirmed. "We checked the used glasses on that."

"She sat down on the other side of the bed from me and started looking through a movie magazine."

"You say a movie magazine. How do you know it was a movie magazine?"

"I spotted a picture of Sophia Loren from where I was sitting."

The police officer opened a drawer, took out a large manila folder, took a movie magazine out of that, and started leafing through it. He stopped when he came to a full-page picture of Sophia Loren. He looked at Duane. "She was reading a movie magazine," was all he said on that. "Go on."

"We talked a little, and she told me how she had come to take such jobs, in the beginning. The thought of what she was doing seemed to depress her. Then they knocked on the door and she hurried into bed." And without quite knowing how it had got in there, he heard himself blurt out, "I liked her."

This was a variation all right, but a benign one. He could tell by the expression on the other's face that its ingenuousness had struck him favorably.

"And you didn't come close to her, didn't touch her in any way, at any time?"

"Not even from the opposite ends of a cigarette I held out to her which she didn't take; she didn't smoke." His pace of speech quickened a little. "Oh, I nearly forgot. That reminds me. I did leave out something both times, I don't know if it's important or not. She asked if she could use the phone, and she called up a Mrs. D, a neighbor of hers, to ask how her little boy was. This Mrs. D was looking after him for her."

The homicide man got up immediately, went over to the door open-

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ing onto the corridor, and called out to someone. "Check out a Mrs. D, same house and same floor as the Metz girl. Go up and have a talk with her. Maybe she can fill us in on some background data."

Someone said, "Right."

When he'd come back to the table, he gave Duane the ultimate in compliments, from a police officer to a questionee. "You've come up with a pretty good batting average." Then he took a little of the shine out of it by adding, "So far."

"We give each and every one a dry run first," he said as he sat down again. "Then some we may call in a second time, and some even a third time. And out of all of them, sooner or later somebody stays in for keeps.

"But my own feeling, and that's why I'm being so open about this and letting you sit in on it the way I am, is that the final break, when it comes, won't be at this end at all. Won't be at the hotel room either. It'll be at the other end, at the point of origin. At the place where the stuff was purchased, stolen, or otherwise obtained. Access to and possession of. That's where the breakthrough will come. Because otherwise nobody has a motive worth a nickel.

"Since this wasn't a genuine wife-cheating, only a set-up, your wife Dolly certainly doesn't have any motive; the girl was helping her get the very thing she wanted—divorce evidence. Why should she demolish the evidence by doing away with its donor? No motive.

"The same goes for both lawyers. Their fees in this case depended on the girl's services. No motive, no motive.

"The hotel security-man—this may not be for the squeamish—gets a cut or a kickback out of the proceedings, just as he does out of other kinds of night calls in that type of hotel, which we don't have to go into here."

Duane noticed he had omitted to mention three of the seven: the photographer, the room-service waiter, and himself. He hitched around on his chair, as though it were becoming overheated.

"Let's have them all in for a second processing," the homicide man said. He picked up his phone. "Send Moyer the hotel dick in."

"Sit down, Bill." The investigator used the man-to-man technique on him, Duane noticed.

Moyer made an informal hydraulic-crane shape out of one leg across the top of the other, then hung onto the ankle of it with both hands as though to make sure the ankle didn't detach itself from the rest of the leg.

"You'd already seen the girl before you flagged down the room. That what you told us before?"

"I seen her going up. I knew what she was there for."

"How'd you know?"

"I'd seen her do the same trick before, that's how I knew."

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"You didn't object?"

"Look, if the hotel don't care, why should I? I work for the hotel. It's gotta be done somewhere."

"You a married man, Bill?"

"That's a handout from the birds," said Bill poetically.

"Got a girl, Bill?"

"Three or four," said Bill.

"She one of them?"

"Narrh," said Bill, as if his good taste was being questioned. "She din' get to me," he explained succinctly.

"In other words, you didn't like her but you didn't dislike her either."

"I was completely newtrull," Bill said.

Exit Moyer the hotel detective.

"Not the type," was the interrogator's exonerating remark. "A chemical agent would be too subtle for him. His way would more likely be to break a girl's neck between his bare hands and bring down the walls and half the ceiling while he was about it, with enough noise for the riot squad to be called."

Next came Stan Roark the photographer.

The homicide man's approach this time was unfriendly and unbending, Duane soon caught on—the normal reaction of the detective to anything veering toward the shady side.

"Do much of this stuff?" was his opener.

"What stuff?" was the to-be-expected answer to the gambit.

"Taking phony pictures for spiked divorce cases."

"Cronin called me and told me he wanted me to take pictures of a couple in a hotel room. He told me what hotel, which room, and what time to be there. That's all I know."

The homicide man raised his voice to an ugly yell. "Well, that isn't all *we* know! He's a mind reader, ha? That's how he knew ahead of time which room in which hotel they were going to be in, and what time they were going to be in there! If that isn't a souped-up—"

"Taking pictures isn't illegal. I don't plead the case, he pleads it. He's the one you want to talk to, not me."

This didn't do the questioning-officer's mood any good. "One of these I-know-my-legal-rights creeps, eh? Try to give me that, and I'll rub your dirty nose in this mess, I promise you!"

And he proceeded to do the talking the other had tried to sidestep. "How long have you known this girl?" he asked ominously.

"Never saw her before," came the clipped answer.

"Let's see if he's got her listed." Again the man in charge of the investigation took out one of those manila envelope-folders, all ticketed and indexed for ready reference. From this one he took out a black pocket-size address-and-telephone notebook, its pages warped and swollen by numerous postscript-entries, thumbings-through, and

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holdings at an open split while in use, so that the pages no longer fell together flat the way they should have.

He handed it to someone else at the table, though. This was so there could be audible playback between them, for Roark to hear. A man thumbing a book can't talk to himself out loud; he can, but it's not very convincing.

"Wherdge get that?" Roark alerted with instant ownership-jealousy.

"At that cockroachy loft you call a studio," was the noncourteous answer. "Look under N first," he instructed the man with the book. This was a deliberate false lead, Duane guessed, so that relief would show on Roark's face at their obvious lack of accurate information, and later give him away if he really did know her name. There was no other way to explain it. Duane could see the homicide man watching Roark's face with target-practice intentness.

Nothing showed on it. Not even the effort to make sure that nothing *did* show.

"Try M, then."

Still nothing showed. He really doesn't know her name, Duane became convinced.

"Try R for Rose, without any second name."

Nothing showed—not in the book, not on the face.

"Go on, get out of here!" roared the examiner in dismissal, with all the irritability of any person, policeman or layman, who comes out second-best. "But don't think we're not going to keep an eye on you!"

"Can I have my book back?" was the last thing Roark said.

"In the rear of a pig you can!" the detective thundered at him. And in this one instance, at least, he was neither angelic nor Princetonian in diction. "We're turning it over to the Vice Squad for further study. See them about it."

"Bluff," he admitted when the door had closed. "But I like to see that kind of guy squirm a little."

The two lawyers were what is known colloquially as a breeze. They just walked through, as stage people say. The detective's attitude, from what Duane could judge, seemed to be that they both knew the law too well to try to monkey around with anything like murder. Their own professional experience had taught them that you can't win. They weren't fools enough to cut their own throats that way. He treated both with lip-respect but with very obvious personal disapproval, because of the short cut by which they had sought to get around the divorce law. He had Arnold in first, then Mrs. Duane's lawyer.

Nothing of any importance was said.

Arnold had never seen the girl from first to last, not in life, not in death. He had already left the room and gone back to his office, Duane now recalled, before she arrived. Then when he caught up with

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Duane at the station house for a first consultation, she was already at the city morgue.

Kevin Cronin's story was substantially that which the girl had told Duane herself. Her dead husband had been his client; after his death Cronin had felt sorry for her, given her part-time typing jobs. Then he'd made her this offer to play a divorce dummy from time to time. No pressure had been involved—she had accepted voluntarily.

To this all the homicide man had to say, brittlely, was: "Your motives seem pretty good, counselor. But your methods were a little bit seamy, weren't they? Wasn't there a more honorable way you could have helped her?"

"It's all relative," was the enigmatic reply. "What's honorable, what's dishonorable? I don't know these things; do you? I think it's honorable for a young woman to support her baby boy by taking on a job she finds obnoxious, distasteful. More honorable by far than if she did something like this without the pressing need to do it."

"You can tell he's a lawyer," was the homicide man's summary, glancing over his shoulder as the door closed. "He leaves you all tangled up." He shook his head, as if to clear it.

"Send the lady in," was his next directive.

There was only one lady in it, and Duane knew who she must be.

"I'm going to ask you to step inside to the next room," the detective in charge said to Duane. "She'll be able to answer my questions more naturally; you'd only make each other self-conscious if you were both in the room at the same time."

This was the first time he'd asked him to do this, and that spectral question mark in his mind, as before, glowed briefly, then dimmed again.

He went into an adjoining room and they closed the door on him. They did the closing themselves to make sure it was closed. That small detail made him vaguely uneasy; it was too much like being in custody. Well, he was actually, he reminded himself; a thing doesn't have to have a label to be a fact.

He pulled a straightback wooden chair over by the window and sat down to stare, looking inward more than outward. The window had bars, and it hadn't been washed in so long that trying to see through it was like looking through a glass of watery milk held up to a dim light. But on the other side he could make out a cross-section of bricks. Once rosy, they were now gray; maybe put there in the Sixties—the last century's Sixties, not this. He counted them to give himself something to do. Eight rows up and down, and five bricks across in each row.

What could she tell them, anyway? Only that from where she stood he'd been a lousy husband, and that wasn't what was being

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investigated. Funny, he thought; if I'd been a better husband and she'd been a better wife, that girl might be alive right now.

"All right, Duane, you can come back," somebody called through, closed door and all, and he got up, opened the door, and went back in.

The homicide man was just coming back from showing someone to the door. A quite unusual courtesy, around there.

Fancy Dan, the ladies' man, Duane commented to himself, quite unjustly. But the thought of his wife always put a mental chip on his shoulder. That perfume she always used, *Dangeureuse*, was all over everything.

The homicide man was shading his mouth with the curved edge of his hand, to close off a slow-dying grin.

"What was it, some crack about me?" Duane accused hotly.

"About the girl," he said deprecatingly. "I have no right to laugh, either. She's got a sense of humor, though. 'She was a good girl, you can count on that. I bet she read her Bible every night. Sure, every night in a different hotel room.' "

He sat down and riffled some papers he had been referring to durint the last questioning. And when he nudged a paper clip onto the edge of them and gave them a little half fling away from him, Duane somehow knew it meant that person was in the clear.

"Now we have two left. The waiter—and *you*."

Duane's shoulders bunched a little, defensively.

Next he's going to say, he told himself miserably, Now we have one left—*you*.

"Bring in Josélito Guzman, better known in English as Joey among the hotel bell crew. And bring in the tape you got on that interview. You know the one."

Something was brought in and parked over in the corner, with a crepe-like black hood draped over it like the ones they sometimes use to cover typewriters.

Duane remembered the face from the brief interlude with the tray that had been swung around in putting it down, and that he had swerved away from to avoid colliding with it. Good-looking face, choir-boy face, badly frightened face.

"My shift start at four. If I do not clock in, I lose my job."

"You won't," was the calm reassurance.

"Or else I lose my whole-day pay, which for me just as bad."

On this he received no reassurance.

"Now repeat what you've already told us once before. We want to check for some little detail that you might have forgotten. Go over it carefully."

His confidence came back. He became more voluble. Some of the quick Spanish speech-beat slipped over into his English. "Orrai. The bellboy ring down about five fifteen, maybe a little after. The room-serv-

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ice steward set up the tray—rye, White Rock, bucket of ice, two empty glasses. He hand it to me, I take it up there."

"Who was in the room?"

"Two men." He turned to look Duane in the face, straight forwardly enough. "This man. And one other man, wearing glasses."

"No girl?"

He semaphored an emphatic negative with his hands, crossing them over, then spreading them apart. "No girl. Nobody else."

"Did you come back a second time?"

"I have to bring back change. He gave me ten-dollar bill, and I do not have my tip yet."

"Who was in there *then?*"

"Now one man is gone. Now girl is there. This man, he still there." He nudged toward Duane with his chin.

"Did you see who the girl was?"

"She put magazine up over her face, to keep me from seeing who she is."

"But you *did* see who she was?"

"Same girl I see twice before in room."

The homicide man, for reasons of his own, wanted this clarified. "You mean in that same room?"

"No, no. Different room, different man, but same girl." And under his breath in his own language he added a reflection that sounded like: "*Desgraciada.*" Disgraceful one, or disgraced one. Something like that.

"You don't approve?"

Sullen shrug. "I am not a priest."

"Could you love a girl like that?"

Duane wondered where the homicide man was going with this—he was so far off-base.

"I have to be crazy," was the bitter answer.

"Tell me a little more about yourself. Your family background."

"I come here from Puerto Rico when I am twelve."

"Your family come with you, or you come alone?"

"They stay down there, but I have uncle who is already here. He have own business in New Jersey, he make good money. They send me to him, so I learn business. I go to night school, and in daytime I work for him in shop. I am—" He reached for a word, found it. "—apprentice."

"What line of business is this uncle of yours in?"

"He is in shoe business."

"You mean he repairs shoes, and like that? How can there be much money in—?"

"No, no. He make them. He has little factory."

"Oh, he's a shoe-*manufacturer.* I see."

"Not like big company, big chain. Just small, one-man business, few machines in loft building, to cut lasts, stitch tops to soles—"

"Dye?" supplied the homicide man almost unnoticeably.

"Dye," the waiter replied. "Everything from firs' to las'."

"Like a small, family-type enterprise?"

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"But our people buy from him a lot. He know just what they like, better than some big shoe company."

"Let's get back to the girl," said the homicide man briskly, as though this had all been a side issue, a breathing spell, a chit-chat break. "If you didn't know her, and she didn't know you, why did she put a magazine up to screen her face like that, when you stepped in there?"

"Because she have a guilty heart." He probably means conscience, Duane thought. "She know she should be ashame' to be there. And because she know that, it *make* her to be ashame'."

"That won't wash," the homicide man told him flatly. "The street doorman held the door open for her when she came in; she didn't try to hide her face from him. The starter looked right at her as she stood there by the elevator waiting for the car; she didn't try to hide her face from him. When she got on and told the operator what floor she wanted, he looked right at her too; and she didn't try to hide her face from *him.* We've checked with all these people. Why were you the only one she tried to hide her face from? Why just you?"

Silence.

"You don't answer. Then I'll answer for you. Because you knew her on the outside, you've seen her on the outside, gone out with her on the outside—" he produced one of those pauses that are so dramatic at such times "—been in love with her on the outside. And told her you'd rather see her dead than doing what she was doing—on the outside."

"I din' know her from—from!" the young fellow cried out.

"Oh, yes you knew her from-from. Now you're starting to tell lies." The homicide man's patient air of reproach was almost paternal. "And we're going to have to keep you from doing that." He turned to somebody else. "Run the tape of the interview with Mrs. D. Never mind the earlier part of it. Cut in—you know where I mean—where she hears the doorbell ringing next door."

He cut in a little too soon. A single word came out—meaningless standing alone by itself. He rectified his starting place, moved further along, and the next try hit it on the nose. It started to slither with a hiss as soft as a nylon being shuffled up a woman's leg.

"One night I heard a continuous ringing at her doorbell. You know how these apartment house walls are, like tissue paper. And the bell battery was right up against my own wall. It was like having a bee in the room with you. I knew she was in there with the baby, and I wondered why she didn't answer it. It kept on, and kept on, and kept on. Finally I opened my own door a couple of inches, with the chain left on, and peeked out. There was a young man standing there in front of her door.

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He was holding a bunch of flowers in his hand.

"While I was watching, I saw him give one last push at the bell. It still didn't get an answer from her. Then he threw the flowers down on the floor, kicked them apart with his foot, stomped all over them, and went away steaming mad."

*Man's voice:* "Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"I most certainly would. He was turning his face every which way, so I got a look at it from all sides. When she came over to see me later on, after the coast was clear, she told me she'd had to hold her hand over the baby's mouth the whole time to keep it from cooing or gurgling, and giving her away."

*Man's voice:* "Did she know who was ringing?"

"Of course. She stole a look from the window and saw him come out down below as he was leaving the house."

*Man's voice:* "Did she tell you who?"

"The first thing she told me. She said, 'That was Joey again, that room-service waiter down at the hotel.' Those were her very words. She said, 'I made the mistake of my life going out with him those couple of times. Now I can't get rid of him. He not only wants to reform me, he wants to marry me. He thinks I do it for real and not just for legal evidence. I can't seem to get it through his head'."

The tape cut off.

"Come inside," the homicide man said to the waiter. "I want you to stand up for Mrs. Diamond and see if she identifies you."

There was a taut wait of several minutes, after they'd gone out of the room, that Duane found as nerve-racking and hard to bear as though his own destiny was hanging in the balance, not somebody else's.

When the homicide man reappeared in the doorway he was alone. Joey the lovelorn had been sidetracked off somewhere.

He made that gesture that has been referred to before, the sign-off, the final one, the climax to it all—the gesture that means it's all over, like the downturned thumbs of the Romans in the arena—the thumb jerk to the police stenographer. "Inside," he said, "and bring your pad along. Get ready to take down a confession."

And in an aside to Duane, as he turned to follow him out, he couldn't help beaming: "Whoever invented the tape recorder did more for us cops than anyone else since the beginnings of crime, Bertillon included."

There was another wait, much longer this time, but not as much of a strain.

Duane fiddled with his hands on the table, cracking his finger joints, twirling the ashtray by its edge, first one way then the other. He hadn't been told he could go, and he was afraid if he got up and tried to, the man who had stayed behind at the

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table laboriously checking something out, would lift up his head and say, Who told you you could go?

He did lift it finally, as Duane's restlessness at last penetrated his awareness.

"I'm out of cigarettes," Duane said lamely.

"I'll send someone out for you." He called a uniformed patrolman to the door.

Sheepishly Duane named his brand.

When the man had come back and handed over the pack, Duane asked his table companion behind the back of his hand, "Do you tip a cop when he gets some cigarettes for you?"

"That would be insulting his uniform." And then the man added with an enigmatic drop of an eyelid, "You're our guest here."

To Duane it didn't sound as convivial as it was meant to.

The homicide man came back in, multiple papers in his hand. "Signed, sealed, and delivered," he said. "Case closed."

The humanist in Duane couldn't help thinking while he watched the homicide man pat his paperwork together: he did his job and did it well. And yet—somebody's going to have to pay with years of his life for it. Does he have to look so darned serene, even happy, about it?

"I told you the break would come from the outside, at the source," he said to Duane. "Access and opportunity to possess. I knew it was he the minute he told me his uncle had a shoe-manufacturing plant. This nitrobenzine is used in the dyeing of shoes. He was the only one of the seven could put his fingers on it quickly and without any difficulty. And there's a switch to it that might interest *you* a lot."

"What?"

"He admits he poured the stuff into the bucket of cracked ice, which was pretty soupy by that time anyway. It was *you* the stuff was intended for, not the girl at all. He'd been out with her two or three times, and he knew she never touched a drop under any circumstances. *You* were the defiler, so you were supposed to get it. He didn't count on her dipping the handkerchief in the ice water to make a sort of cold compress of it before pasting it across the upper part of her face."

"I didn't notice her do that, myself," Duane admitted.

"Probably you were too flustered by their knocking on the door right then. She must have done that, because our toxicologist found the handkerchief impregnated with it. How else explain it? Lucky for you that you didn't take a drink and use that ice, or there would have been a doubleheader in that room.

"The Latins," he went on, "take their women with an intensity which is almost beyond belief. They're either all-good or all-bad, all-white or all-black, up on a pedestal or down in the gutter—there's never any in-between. And you have to compromise, you have to live with

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the gray, with the in-between, you have to live with life the way it is. He's not a cold-blooded murderer, he's a kind of crazy idealist. He'll probably get an indeterminate sentence."

Duane was trembling. It could so easily have been himself.

"Have a cup of coffee with us, Mr. Duane, just to show there's no hard feelings," the homicide man invited. He was Mr. Duane now that he was in the clear; funny how those things went, he couldn't help reflecting. If he'd been booked, there'd have been no respectful title.

"I never had coffee in a police station before," he admitted.

"Well, have some now, then," he was urged. "It's on the house."

When it had been brought in and passed around and siphoned up noisily by lip suction they asked him hospitably, "How is it?"

It was rotten. Rotten was even a compliment to it. It tasted as if somebody's unwashed socks had been left soaking overnight in the coffee urn. And then a little detergent added to bring out the full bouquet.

Duane didn't knock it; he was well-mannered that way. He just smiled and swallowed hard to keep it from backing up.

Then he shook hands all around and left.

"Want us to run you home?" the property clerk asked him when he came outside, was given back his belongings, and had signed a receipt.

"I'll get a taxi," he said. He'd had enough of the police for one night. Or for one lifetime.

"You may have a hard time getting one around here at this hour," the deskman called after him as he went out the door. "Most of our traffic is one-way. In. And not by taxi."

But he didn't have any trouble. One honked at him impatiently, almost commandingly, just as soon as he had come out on the sidewalk.

"Well, come on, stupid," a familiar voice called out to him. "Don't just stand there all night. I want to get home."

He went up to the door and looked in, and the legal Mrs. Duane was sitting in it, staring at him with what couldn't exactly be called a melting glance.

"You?" he said bewilderedly. "What do you want now? My right arm? My life's blood?"

He got in and slammed the door. "Is the divorce off?"

"The S.P.C.A. might object," she said wearily.

"I thought there was somebody else you were interested in."

"He'll keep."

"He doesn't come up with fur stoles at the bat of an eyelash. Is that what you mean? There never was a chump like me."

"Big deal, that mangy thing," she said scathingly. "It took you so long to clean up the instalments on it that the animal had pups before the pelt was paid for."

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"You must have been pretty sure I'd come out of there, to wait around like this."

"It figured. You would never be up to killing anybody. It takes a man to do that, not a mush-head like you."

"Why don't you turn left there?" he challenged the driver. "Why do you take us all the way over? What are you trying to do, make an extra couple of blocks' fare on your meter?"

She gave her own knees a brush-off of exasperation, to and fro, as if she was dusting them. "Even in a taxi he's got to back-seat drive! You wouldn't be able to find your way to Forty-second Street if you were standing on the south side of Times Square."

"Why don't you haul your tongue in to half-mast," he said chivalrously.

They drove away together side by side, husband and wife. They didn't love each other. They didn't hate each other either. Not really. They were used to each other. He was a headache, she was a pain. But somebody new might turn out even worse.

Something the homicide man had said inside there a few minutes ago came back to him; You have to compromise, you have to live with the gray, with the in-between, you have to live with life the way it is.

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**11 *NEW* stories—including**

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 307th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and it was quite a story for your Editors to find in the morning mail—we were practically stunned!*

*At the time Dennis M. Dubin wrote "Elroy Quinn's Last Case," he was a senior in New Hyde Park Memorial High School. Dennis is quite a boy! He not only writes detective fiction, he writes for the high school paper, is literary editor of the high school magazine (The Auriga), plays varsity soccer, and still has time for homework, to say nothing of working three nights a week in a drug store. (Oh, to be young again!)*

*As you have guessed, Dennis is a mystery fan—no, more properly, he's a true aficionado. When he was fifteen, he began to collect the "cornerstones" in the Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library. His favorite detective authors make an interesting list, and those mystery writers who do not appeal to him make up an equally interesting list. He particularly likes "to compare detectives, and to discuss them with my mother, who is also a mystery buff and started me off on mysteries in the first place." (We have had the pleasure of talking with Mrs. Dubin; she told us she has read EQMM since Volume One, Number One.)*

*Dennis described his letter to us as "talking my heart out to another real mystery buff, especially the creator of Ellery Queen; if I do not stop now, I will write an 8,000-word essay!"*

*Dennis plans to go to college, and although he is interested in all the sciences and might become a biologist or chemist, his present vocational goal is psychology. His "first story" reveals that young Dennis is already a shrewd and practical psychologist. We can only warn the other favorite detective-story writers on Dennis' list: Be prepared—young Dennis will undoubtedly ride again!*

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# ELROY QUINN'S LAST CASE

*by DENNIS M. DUBIN*

SHARP SHADOWS WERE FALLING THROUGH THE YELLOWED SLATS OF THE VENEtian blinds as Elroy Quinn groaned softly and adjusted himself and the book he was reading to take advantage of the failing light. No sooner was he more comfortable than he was startled by the ringing of the telephone. Moving slowly, he got up and groped for the receiver in the dimness. My eyes are worse than ever, Elroy thought grimly. Long ago he had discarded his pince-nez for thicker, stronger lenses. Locating the telephone at last, he put it to his ear with a trembling hand. "Hello?" he said in a low, gentle voice.

"Elroy?" came a firm deep basso in reply.

"Tom, Junior! I haven't heard from you for a year. Or more. What's the word in town?"

"The word is crazy. There's been a peculiar murder, the sort of thing you used to investigate with Dad. Interested?"

Elroy cackled with delight. "What is it, a dying message or a fantastic clue?"

"Could be either or both. Feel up to it? Say yes and I'll have a car around in half an hour."

"Yes!" shot back the enthusiastic if quavery reply.

"As you've probably read in the papers," said Inspector Thomas Velie, Junior to Elroy, as they traveled to the scene of the crime, "the King of Ubinorabia arrived here two days ago to begin talks on the huge oil deposit recently discovered in his country. The situation is explosive, to say the least. This is the first time since the sixties that East and West will be sitting across a conference table and discussing something peacefully. Any incident, no matter how trivial, could lead to a break-up of this conference. And if that happens, the rift between the hemispheres will be widened beyond any possible negotiation."

Elroy whistled softly. "Things that bad? I've been a little out of touch, you know."

"Worse! Yet both sides want peace. It's just that they want other things too. Like this oil . . . Well, anyway, the only sure way to break up the conference would be to get rid of the King. Then his son—"

"Son?"

"He's only got one son, the heir of course to the throne. No one knows



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much about him; he's been at exclusive private schools in England since he was five. The point is that he's rumored to be violently opposed to the United States. If he were King there'd be no conference. And there are men who would do almost anything to see him on the throne for that very reason."

Velie paused, then resumed in a low, hard voice. "Elroy," he said slowly, "I got a call from the Big Man himself. He said that this conference may be the last chance for world peace. He said that if something happened to the King and his son ascended to the throne there'd be the devil to pay. Those were his exact words. Elroy, I can't let that happen."

"From what you've said, I assume the dead man is not the King. Then who is it?"

"It's one of the King's bodyguards, a man named Daja-nuna. He—wait, here we are."

They entered the sumptuous lobby of the city's newest hotel where the King had taken an entire floor of rooms. Now it was bustling with police and reporters. Inspector Velie pushed his way into an elevator, herding Elroy in front of him. The elevator door slid shut, leaving a bewildered knot of reporters staring after them. In answer to an unspoken question a grizzled, long-faced veteran said suddenly, "That old guy—why, he looked like Elroy Quinn!"

"Aw, c'mon, Pop," said one of the younger journalists, "that would make him older than—than—" His voice trailed off embarrassedly.

"There isn't much to tell," said Velie as they gazed at the body sprawled on the luxurious bed. "According to this report that Doc Purty just sent up, death was instantaneous, resulting from a single bullet through the head."

"So there's no dying message clue," Elroy muttered.

"No. But we've certainly got a fantastic one."

Both gazes shifted to the dead man's head on which rested a gleaming, ornate plumed helmet such as had been used in the times of the Gladiators and the Arena.

"The way I see it," said Velie, "it was a case of mistaken identity. The King had just left to see the town. He took three of his bodyguards with him and left this one behind to watch the rooms. Seeing that things were quiet, Daja-nuna must have lain down for a few moments. He fell asleep and was murdered by someone who thought that he was the King. He certainly does bear enough resemblance in size and build to be mistaken for him in the dark."

Velie turned to Elroy, only to find the old detective fingering a small

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statuette of two seemingly identical Thai cats and staring, unlistening, into space. "What's that?" Velie demanded with ill-concealed annoyance.

"Curious," replied Elroy. "One of these cats has more than one tail."

Velie choked back an angry retort. He remembered how many times in the past Elroy had placed emphasis on the most trivial points and how invariably they turned out to be significant clues. "You think it's important?" he asked.

"If the King or one of his servants is around, you might ask them where this statuette came from."

Velie frowned, then handed the statuette to one of his men. After a whispered conference the man left. He returned shortly, and again conferred with Velie. Velie's eyebrows nearly shot off his forehead in surprise.

"Why, you old fox! Three servants and the King himself all swear that they've never seen that statuette before."

Elroy sighed. "Then we have two clues. A Gladiator's helmet and a pair of cats, one with a plethora of tails. Find the connection and I think it will point directly at the murderer."

"It's beyond me," said Velie as they left. "I told you—it's your kind of case. Just like old times, Elroy."

They drove in silence that was interrupted only when Elroy had a sudden long coughing spell. It reminded Velie of his passenger's age and he decreased his speed.

"You'll be sure to phone me if something else turns up?" said Elroy as they parted.

"Of course. And if something occurs to you, you'll phone me personally at headquarters?"

"You can count on it. Thanks for calling me in, Tom—it *was* like old times."

"Yeah," said Velie, " 'Night."

" 'Night."

Two days later Elroy himself answered the doorbell to find Velie standing there, his face flushed with excitement.

"There's been a new development. Thought I'd bring along the news and the new clues with it." Reaching into a sack, he withdrew a large-sized sabot. Inside the wooden shoe was a small replica of a mummy case, oddly decorated and inscribed.

"No fingerprints, naturally," murmured Elroy.

"No. These were left near the King's bed, in the same place you found the statuette. We had a man watching the King's suite while he was out, but he was knocked on the head. Not very hard—just enough to daze him

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for a few minutes. But he didn't see the intruder." Velie paused. "Well, what do you think? Can you translate that red writing inside the mummy case?"

Elroy examined the miniature sarcophagus. "The inscription is in Greek."

"Greek! What does it say?"

"It's hard to read," said Elroy, squinting at the bright red lettering, "but roughly translated it means 'the beginning of crime'."

"Too much for me," grumbled Velie. "I just don't get it."

"Not too puzzling—in fact, some of this business is quite obvious. Perhaps too obvious!" There was the trace of an old habit in Elroy's teasing drawl. "The murderer certainly intends to kill the King. But the death of Daja-nuna was not a case of mistaken identity. He was killed for another reason—most likely because he surprised the murderer in the act of trespassing in the King's suite."

"I don't follow you."

"The murderer *knew* that the King was away. That's why he came. He didn't expect anyone to be there."

"Then why did he come at all if he intended to kill the King?"

"To plant his first clues—the helmet and the two cats. Just as he came last night to plant the shoe and the sarcophagus."

Velie thought for a moment. "Maybe he planted the clues just to taunt the police."

"I thought of that and there are three objections. First, *no* murderer would carry such bulky objects on his person, knowing that his intended victim would be heavily guarded and therefore difficult to kill. Second, if the murderer wanted to plant clues after the murder of the King, why did he leave them after murdering the wrong man? He must have known that Daja-nuna was not the King as soon as he got close enough to put the helmet on his head. And third, if the killer wanted to plant clues only after the King's death, why break into his rooms a second time risking everything to plant new clues?

"No," Elroy continued, "it seems quite obvious that the clues were meant to be planted *before* the assassination of the King. They are a challenge to the police to discover the murderer's identity *before* he kills the King. Or perhaps the murderer is just 'playing fair' with the police, trusting the Fates to decide who will win, the killer or the police."

"Do you think, then, that he'll try to plant even more clues?"

"Very possibly. How soon does the King leave?"

"Not for another ten days at least."

"Well, the killer certainly has plenty of time to plant more."

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"Killing the King won't be easy now. Not only has he hired three more bodyguards, but I've detailed a dozen detectives to watch day and night. The biggest danger comes from the King himself. He insists on going out on the town—to the mangiest collection of night clubs in the city. And he goes out every night." Velie's voice lowered to a brief mutter but Elroy distinctly heard the words, "the fat old lecher."

"Remember," Elroy interjected gently, "our man seems to know all about the King's movements."

"Well," said Velie, as he prepared to leave, "I'm doubling the police guard around the hotel. If he makes another attempt to plant his cryptic little clues, he'll be nabbed like that." He snapped his fingers.

"Meanwhile, Velie, we have to try to connect the clues we have now—to find out what meaning they have in common."

"I knew this was going to be a weird case, Elroy. That's why I called you in. 'Night."

" 'Night," said Elroy softly as he shut the door quickly to keep out the chill night air.

One blissful, peaceful, completely uneventful week passed. The cordon of men protecting the King began to relax. Relaxation, however, was not for Inspector Velie. He fretted and fumed and called up Elroy daily. It seemed to Velie that the old master knew something—but Elroy would say nothing.

On the eighth day it rained. It was a bitter, stinging rain that drove the city's citizens off the streets. By nightfall the rain had changed into a thick, soupy London-type fog that swirled in the empty streets.

At 9:00 that night the King announced his intention of going to Club Midway, one of the shadier of the city's nightspots. The pleas and protests of his attendants and of the police escort were useless.

"The pompous old idiot!" snarled Velie when one of his men telephoned the news. For a big man he could move surprisingly fast; in less than ten minutes he was in his car and speeding across the city in a furious race to intercept the King.

He was too late. He rounded the last corner on two wheels, just in time to hear the echoes of six quick rifle shots reverberating, then dying away. Even as he leaped from his car, hearing the cries of pursuit, he knew it was futile. The thickness of the fog made it easy for the murderer to escape.

But the King was not dead. Lying motionless in a hospital bed, he hovered between life and death. The doctors said that recovery was just as possible as death. It was an even bet.

The shots had been fired from the roof of a building across the way

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from the hotel. Here, Velie found his first understandable clue—an expensive rifle manufactured by a famous American firm. Tracing the owner was easy—too easy. Velie followed the trail to a shabby apartment in a squalid section of town. But nobody had ever seen the occupant—the landlady got her rent and that was all she knew or cared about.

Inside the apartment Velie found nothing except the box the gun had come in when it had been shipped to the address. Opening it, he found a note that read:

"For the *coup de grâce*—to end a King's life."

That was all. No fingerprints, no description of the occupant—nothing more to track down. Velie had reached a dead end.

For the next ten days, as the world wondered and watched, Velie drove his staff mercilessly. Informers were paid huge sums, every tip was investigated, every wild theory was weighed and examined. The only interesting fact turned up in those ten days was that the King's son had not appeared, either to disrupt the conference or to claim the throne during his father's disability.

In the middle of the afternoon of the tenth day the vision of the stooped, shrunken figure of Elroy Quinn flashed in Velie's bloodshot eyes. Suddenly it seemed to Velie that the only man in the world who could put all the clues together and name the killer, just by the power of his logical, deducto-analytical brain, was Elroy Quinn. "The old fox must know something," Velie mused aloud. He ate a quick lunch and drove out to see the great man himself.

He was met at the door by a stern and frowning doctor. From somewhere deep in the recesses of the house came a prolonged outburst of coughing. Then a hoarse voice called weakly, "Who's there, Doctor?"

"Tell him it's Tom Velie."

The doctor's countenance changed instantly. "Mr. Velie, you must be psychic! He's been asking for you. The poor man's in bad shape. At his advanced age, you know—"

Velie waited to hear no more. He shouldered past the doctor and into the sickroom. Elroy lay propped against pillows, a tall thin scarecrow of pajama and bone. His obvious relief at seeing Velie brought on another racking spell. But finally the old man, pale as death, his emaciated body quivering, pulled himself together—for a last effort.

"The mystery is solved," Elroy said hoarsely, his voice barely a whisper. "I wanted to tell you, but I was too ill. The King is not dead yet, is he?"

"No, the doctors say it could go either way. And you, you lively old fox—"

"This is the end of the line for me, I'm afraid." He cackled suddenly.

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"But I am an old fox, eh?" For a moment his eyes flashed silver, as they had so often in the past.

Velie frowned and turned slightly away. It agonized him to see Elroy Quinn so obviously on his deathbed.

Elroy caught the movement and its meaning. "The murderer is a fox," explained Elroy with a crooked smile. Then he grimaced and shut his eyes in pain. When he opened them again, the dying man and the Inspector stared at each other wordlessly for several seconds. Then Elroy said, in a startlingly strong voice, "I shot the King. There's a full report of my methods and motives in the drawer of my desk."

"You!" Velie gasped. "*You!*"

"Yes." The answer was as firm and steady as his gaze.

Velie was at a total loss. The world spun like a pinwheel; then a whirlpool seemed to pull him down, threatening to drown him. He struggled for air. "Why? Just tell me—*why*?"

"Too long a story—haven't the strength—" Then, summoning his last reserve, Elroy sat up slightly. When he spoke again, his voice was weak but surprisingly clear.

"I'll try to explain . . . As I've grown older I've watched the world divide into two conflicting forces, with destruction inescapable for both sides. Then I learned of this conference, a giant step toward world peace, and I was determined that this conference should not fail. To insure its success I decided to investigate the force I knew was working for the failure of the conference and I unearthed a diabolical plot. If this conspiracy had succeeded in wrecking the conference, the world might be blowing itself apart at this very moment.

"Proof of this plot? I can give you nothing tangible, nothing to show the C.I.A. or the F.B.I. I pieced it together from hundreds of fragments of information and hundreds of logical deductions based on those fragments. My problem was not to provide proof, or to expose the plot to the world. Had I tried to do either, the conference would certainly have been called off. No, my problem was to find a way to destroy the conspiracy so that the conference would continue its work for world peace."

Velie could restrain himself no longer. "What plot?"

"Simply to kill the King and thus let his son ascend to the throne. But —the King himself was one of the plotters. The King was a dying man and he knew it. He was completely under the influence of his son, the primary plotter, for whom he would do anything—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Velie. "If the son had so much influence over the King, why didn't he just tell his father to abdicate?"

"The people of Ubinorabia would have revolted—it's all in my report."

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The last words were smothered in a sustained attack of coughing. Finally Elroy resumed, his voice and manner noticeably weaker. "Taking all the factors of the problem into consideration I came to the only possible solution—I killed the son."

"What!" sputtered Velie. "But you shot the King, not the son!"

"No. I did shoot the King—but I killed the son first. With one bullet through the head."

"Daja-nuna! He was not a bodyguard—he was the son accompanying his father in disguise. And when the son did not show up later—how stupid of me not to think of it!" Velie smacked his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"If Daja-nuna *had* been an innocent bodyguard who had caught me trespassing in the King's suite, I could never have brought myself to kill him. It is not in me to kill the innocent . . . Once the son was dead I thought the threat to world peace was over. But it wasn't. The King formed a violent hatred for this country, blaming it for his son's death. He made up his mind to wreck the conference himself, if only to honor his son's ambition. But he needed help—that's why he went to those shady night clubs every night—to make contact with his son's accomplices. I had to shoot him before he could act on whatever advice the others gave him."

Elroy's voice faded and he stared, glassy-eyed, at the ceiling. Silence lay heavy in the little room. Elroy broke it at last by mumbling, "Eyes no longer any good—I missed him—he's not dead." Then with an almost superhuman effort he raised himself and spoke clearly once again. "Face to face," the words tumbled out. "Don't you see, I had to come face to face with the problem and solve it the only way it could be solved. With both the King and his son dead, Ubinorabia will now be plunged into a huge power struggle. East and West will *have* to meet face to face over the conference table to prevent the ensuing civil war from escalating into a world conflict. Yes, it had to be done. I had to do it . . ." His voice cracked and he fell silent again. This time Velie broke the silence.

"But what about all those crazy clues—the helmet, the cats, the shoe and the sarcophagus. And the rifle with the strange message. That one came *after* the King was shot—"

"I had to leave one last clue—so you would come back here to see me—so I could explain—confess—" Elroy's energy was draining fast. "I left them so they would point to me, only to me—"

"How in God's name did they point to you?"

Elroy managed a pathetic smile. "Names of my books—you know them, Velie. Gladiator helmet—*The Roman Hat Mystery* . . . two Thai cats, one with more than one tail—*The Siamese Twin Mystery* and *Cat of*

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*Many Tails* . . . sabot—*The Dutch Shoe Mystery* . . . mummy case and inscription—*The Greek Coffin* and *The Scarlet Letters* and *The Origin of Evil* . . . shot both with *The American Gun* . . . and all the others throughout the case—*The Devil To Pay, Halfway House, And On the Eighth Day, Ten Days' Wonder, The Finishing Stroke*. . . . and *The Murderer Is a Fox*—you said it yourself, Velie . . . yes, you were *Face to Face* with them—you know them, you've read them all—*The Player on the Other Side*—played fair with you—always have, always have . . ."

Elroy's voice was suddenly filled with infinite weariness.

The door behind Velie opened and the doctor entered. "Phone call for you, Mr. Velie."

Velie returned in a few minutes and stared at Elroy's parchment face until the sunken eyes flickered open.

"The King is dead," said Velie, continuing the inevitable pattern.

Elroy sighed—as if he understood that it had all been predestined. Then, reverting again to an old habit, he said:

"Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, death after life does greatly please."

Elroy's last words were: "Edmund Spenser—*The Faerie Queene.*"

His eyes flashed silver—for only a moment; then they closed and his head bent toward the far window.

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## ADVENTURES OF THE PUZZLE CLUB

*Shortly after Ellery became the sixth member of The Puzzle Club, the President of the United States was proposed for membership . . .*

# THE PRESIDENT REGRETS

*by ELLERY QUEEN*

THE PUZZLE CLUB IS A CONGERIES of very important people drawn together by unimportant purpose but common passion—to wit, to mystify one another. Their pleasure, in short, is puzzles.

Application is by invitation only, and membership must be won, the applicant having to submit to the Ordeal by Puzzle. If he survives the test, it earns him automatic admission.

Shortly after Ellery became The Puzzle Club's sixth regular member, it was proposed and unanimously voted to invite the President of the United States to apply for membership.

This was no frivolous motion; the members took their puzzles seriously, and the President was known to be a devotee of mysteries in all lawful forms. Besides, the Club's founder and First Member, multimillionaire oil man Syres, had been buddy-buddy with the occupant of the White House since their youthful days as riggers in the Texas oilfields.

The invitation went to Washington, and rather to Ellery's surprise the President promptly accepted the challenge. In deference to affairs of state, he was urged to designate his own date, which he did; but when Ellery arrived at Syres's Park Avenue penthouse on the appointed evening to find the membership assembled, he was greeted with gloomy news. The President regretted that he could not make it after all. A Secret Service man, just departed, had brought the message that a crisis in Asia had caused a last-minute cancellation of the President's flight to New York.

"What shall we do now?" asked Darnell, the famous criminal lawyer.

"There's no point in wasting the puzzle we've prepared for the President," said Dr. Vreeland, the well-known psychiatrist. "Let's save it for whenever he can get here."

"It's too bad Dr. Arkavy is still attending that symposium in Moscow," said wispy little Emmy Wandermere, the poet. Dr. Arkavy was

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the Nobel Prize-winning biochemist. "He has such a fertile mind, he can always come up with something on the spur of the moment."

"Maybe our newest member can help us out," said their Texan host. "What do you say, Queen? You must have a hundred problems at your fingers' ends, from your long experience as a writer and a detective."

"Let me think." Ellery cogitated. Then he chuckled. "All right. Give me a few minutes to work out the details . . ." It took him far less. "I'm ready. I suggest we engage in some collective improvisation, to begin with. Since this is going to be a murder mystery, we will obviously require a victim. Any suggestions?"

"A woman, of course," the lady poet said at once.

"Reeking of glamor," said the psychiatrist.

"That," said the criminal lawyer, "would seem to call for a Hollywood movie star."

"Good enough," Ellery said. "And a glamor girl of the screen calls for a glamorous name. Let's call her . . . oh, Valetta Van Buren. Agreed?"

"Valetta Van Buren." Miss Wandermere considered. "Yes. She personifies sex in her roles—a smoky witch with enormous cold, full-moon eyes. Does that follow, Mr. Queen?"

"Perfectly. Well, Valetta is in New York to attend the première of her latest picture and to do the circuit of TV appearances in promotion of it," Ellery went on. "But this hasn't proved an ordinary publicity tour. In fact, Valetta has had a frightening experience. It so shook her up that she wrote me an agitated letter about it which, by the magic of coincidence, I received just this morning."

"In which," Dr. Vreeland pressed, "she said—"

"That during this New York visit she permitted herself to be squired about town by four men—"

"Who are all, naturally, in love with her?" asked the lady poet.

"You guessed it, Miss Wandermere. She identified the four in her letter. One is that notorious man-about-town and playboy, John Thrushbottom Taylor the Third—and if you haven't heard of Mr. Taylor, it's because I just made him up. The second is that wolf—in both senses—of Wall Street, named . . . well, let's call him A. Palmer Harrison. The third, of course, is the latest rage among society portrait painters, Leonardo Price. And the last of the quartet is—let's see—Biff Wilson, the professional football player."

"A likely story," grinned Oil Man Syres.

"Now." Ellery made a professional bridge of his fingers. "Having named the four men for me, Valetta went on to say that yesterday all four proposed marriage to her—each of them, on the same day. Unhappily, our ineffable Valetta felt

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nothing for any of them—nothing permanent, at any rate. She rejected all four impartially. It was a busy day for Miss Van Buren, and she would have enjoyed it except for one thing."

"One of them," said the criminal lawyer, "turned ugly."

"Exactly, Darnell. Valetta wrote me that three of them took their turndowns with approximate grace. But the fourth flew into a homicidal rage and threatened to kill her. She was terrified that he would try to carry out his threat and asked me to get in touch with her at once. She felt reluctant to go to the police, she wrote, because of the bad publicity it would bring her."

"What happened then?" asked Syres.

"I phoned, of course," Ellery replied, "as soon as I finished reading her letter. Would you believe it? I was too late. She was murdered last night, a short time after she must have mailed the letter. So the screen has lost its sexiest pot, and millions of red-blooded Americans at this very moment are mourning the sheer waste of it all."

"How," asked Darnell, "was the foul deed done?"

"I could tell you," Ellery said, "that she was done in by a Tasmanian yoyo, but I won't be unfair —the nature of the weapon is irrelevant. However, I will say this, to avoid complications: Valleta *was* murdered by the suitor who threatened her life."

"And is that all?" asked the tycoon.

"No, I've saved the kicker for last, Mr. Syres. Valetta's letter gave me one clue. In writing about the four men, she said that she'd noticed *she had something in common with three of the four,* and that the fourth was the one who had threatened her."

"Oh," said Dr. Vreeland. "Then all we have to establish is the nature of the common denominator. The three sharing it with Valetta would be innocent. By elimination, therefore, the one left over has to be the guilty man."

Ellery nodded. "And now—if my initiation at the last meeting was a criterion—the floor is open. Any questions?"

"I take it," the lady poet murmured, "that we may disregard the obvious possibilities of connection —that Valetta and three of the men were of the same age, or had the same color hair, or the same religious affiliation, or came from the same town or state, or attended the same college, or were investors or board members in the same corporation—that sort of thing?"

Ellery laughed. "Yes, you may disregard those."

"Social position?" the multimillionaire ventured. "Three of the men you described—Playboy John Something Taylor, Wall Street man A. Palmer Harrison, Portrait Painter Price—did they all come from high society? That probably would-

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n't be true of the pro football player, What's-His-Name."

"It just happened," Ellery mourned, "that Portrait Painter Price was born in a Greenwich Village pad. And Valetta, of course, hailed from the slums of Chicago."

They pondered.

"Had three of the four men ever served with Valetta," asked Darnell suddenly, "on the same jury?"

"No."

"On a TV panel show?" asked the poet quickly.

"No, Miss Wandermere."

"Don't tell me," said Dr. Vreeland, smiling, "that Valetta Van Buren and three of her suitors at one juncture in their lives shared the same psychiatrist's couch?"

"That's a good solution, Doctor. But it's not the solution I have in mind."

"Politics," the oil man said. "Valetta and three of the suitors are registered in the same party."

"My information, Mr. Syres," said Ellery, "is that Valetta was an incorrigible Democrat, the playboy and the Wall Street men are conservative Republicans, and Price and Biff Wilson never voted in their lives."

Miss Wandermere suddenly said, "It isn't anything like that. Am I right, Mr. Queen, in assuming that all the relevant facts were given to us in the body of your story?"

"I wondered when someone was going to ask that." Ellery chuckled. "That's exactly so, Miss Wandermere. There's really no need to ask questions at all."

"Then I for one need more time," said the tycoon. "What about the rest of you?" At their abstracted nods their host rose. "Then let's make an exception tonight and eat Charlot's exquisite dinner before we crack Queen's puzzle."

Miss Wandermere's shocking blue eyes sparkled with enlightenment during Charlot's *moussaline de saumon*. Darnell's mustache-sized brows lifted with elation over the *suprêmes de volaille aux huîtres*. Dr. Vreeland uttered his self-congratulatory exclamation at the serving of the *selle de veau à l'Orientale*. And their host, Syres, achieved sweet victory over his *charlotte Chantilly*. But no one uttered a word until they were seated about the drawing room again over espresso and brandy.

"I detect from this and that," Ellery said, "that none of you encountered any real difficulty with my little puzzle."

"It's too bad the President had to miss this," Syres roared. "It was made to order, Queen, for his type of mind! Are you all quite ready?"

There was a universal nod.

"In that case," Ellery said, with resignation, "which of Valetta's four swains murdered her?"

### Challenge to the Reader

*Can you qualify for membership in The Puzzle Club?*

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"Females first, always," said Dr. Vreeland with a gallant nod to Miss Wandermere.

"The key to the answer," said the lady poet promptly, "consists in the fact, Mr. Queen, that you really told us just one thing about Valetta *and* her four suitors. It follows that whatever she and three of the four men had in common must relate to that thing."

"A logic I can't dispute," murmured Ellery. "And that thing was?"

Darnell grinned. "What the anticipation of the President's visit here tonight suggested to you when we asked for an impromptu puzzle. Their names."

"You named the movie star Valetta Van Buren," said Syres. *"Van Buren—the name of a President of the United States."*

"Then Playboy John Thrushbottom Taylor the Third," said the psychiatrist. "You buried that one, Queen! But of course Taylor is the name of a President of the United States, too—Zachary Taylor."

"And the Wall Street man, A. Palmer Harrison," the lawyer said. "Harrison—William Henry. Also Benjamin."

"And professional football player Biff Wilson." Miss Wandermere twinkled. "That 'Biff' was masterly, Mr. Queen. But—of course, Wilson, for Woodrow Wilson."

"And that leaves one character whose name," said the oil man, "bears no cross-reference to a President's name—Leonardo Price. So Price, the portrait painter, murdered Valetta. You almost had me fooled, Queen. Taylor, Van Buren, Harrison! That was tricky, picking the more obscure Presidents."

"You could hardly expect me to name one of my characters Eisenhower," Ellery grinned. "Which reminds me." He raised his brandy snifter. "Here's to our absent President—and may he turn out to be the next member of The Puzzle Club!"

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## CRIMINALIMERICKS

*E. Q. by* D. R. Bensen

The volatile Ellery Queen
Needs time to take in the whole scene.
His first quick solutions
Take on convolutions
So devious they're quite Byzantine.

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 308th "first story" to be published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story of special interest to every father and mother who have children of teen age . . .*

*The author, Shirley Wallace, is in her early forties, the mother of three, the wife of a director of engineering in an electronics firm. Before marriage, Shirley Wallace was a newspaperwoman (Newark Evening News, New Jersey), a news writer for the OWI in World War II, and head of the news desk in Italy for the USIS (U.S. Information Service). Now, besides being a mother and wife, she is "exhaustively" active in community affairs; but she warns other would-be writers: don't even dream that you'd* really *write if only you could quit the PTA and other organizational work; if you really want to write you will—no matter what . . . We couldn't agree more.*

# THE TIGER'S CUB

*by SHIRLEY WALLACE*

RICHMOND HARRIS WAS AN INTELlectual, a tall lanky man in his early forties with hair just starting to recede from a high forehead and sleepy eyes in a finely molded face. Despite his usually calm mien, his social reserve, he was a man with strong hidden drive. He had made a great deal of money in his profession and was highly respected in the community of Brookton. Anyone there would have said that Richmond Harris was not the kind of man who could kill another human being.

But today Harris was in a strange town. He sat stiffly in an uncomfortable chair in a strange room in a very old building. He stared silently at this burly, middle-aged, surprisingly distinguished-looking villain sitting arrogantly in the padded swivel chair across from him, and he decided with icy calm that in a very few minutes he would murder the man.

Harris gave himself the few minutes because he was an intellectual. It was necessary for him, as a logical, emotionally stable, moral human being to review his motives and plan his method.

He glanced at Rich, Jr., bound to the armchair with more than fear, and his carefully repressed fury almost broke through. He tore his eyes away from his son. The surg-



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ing ache somewhere deep in his chest might undermine his resolution. His son was perspiring, his face reflected his deep despair, his eyes were stricken—but they hadn't hurt him physically. Rich, Jr. was seventeen, almost a man.

Harris closed his eyes, swallowed hard, and tried not to see the boy as he had been just yesterday, when they had started off on this trip to a strange town. Rich—tall, lanky, with finely molded features—was a young carbon copy of himself; he was still apple-cheeked, despite his weekly shave, still shy with strangers, still too optimistic about life and too exuberant at home, like a Great Dane puppy—but he was smart as a whip, and it would show some day when he settled down, maybe next year, in college.

Harris found his motive for the killing quite simply, and in one piece. He remembered the inane question that Julie, his wife, had put to him years ago.

They had had no children then, although Julie was pregnant with Rich. And one night in their bedroom, just after they'd turned out the lights, she had asked suddenly, "Richmond, would you kill for me?"

He ascribed the discussion that followed to her pregnancy, to Julie's need for extra security—the way other pregnant women simply asked for anchovies in the middle of the night.

But she had gone to sleep content. He'd finally told her yes, there was one circumstance in which he would kill—to protect her or their children.

Still later, with his arm about her swollen waist, thinking about it himself, he felt a fierce, hot anger at any who would dare to threaten her or their children to come. He decided then, and for the rest of his life, that should the time ever come he would kill, and kill gladly.

Harris opened his eyes and looked at this overbearing bully, this blackguard, this inhuman specimen of humanity who was putting them through all this. Their tormentor wasn't solely to blame, but he was the top man, the head of the whole gang of them. And Harris realized that it was his and Rich's own fault, in the first place, for having been so naive, so unwary about this setup, that they'd been maneuvered into a terrible trap.

But no matter now; one thing he was sure of—he must defend his son. There was no stronger, no more moral motive in the universe than this—to protect your child.

Should he act now? Could this well-dressed, smug, supercilious character really deliver the final blow to his son? The scoundrel had hardly stopped talking—no, threatening—since he had lured them into this room. Up to now, since neither Harris nor his son had been able to produce what this devil incarnate expected, he'd really been toying with them, concentrating on

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young Rich as the vulnerable one—trick questions, sly insults, irony, insinuations, all perfectly clear to both of them. No matter what Harris and his son tried from now on, it was too late. Rich, Jr. just wasn't going to make it. In desperation Harris had thought of offering a large sum of money, under the guise of a gift, of mentioning his influential friends, even of pleading. But he knew in his heart that nothing would help.

Harris turned for the last time to his son—to estimate how much more he could take. The boy was white-faced. He'd obviously lost all hope. He sat rigid, only his fingers writhing as he clasped and unclasped his hands. When he was given a chance to speak he mumbled or stuttered—he could make no impression in this kind of situation. Both realized that the man facing them had them by their throats and knew it. This was *his* stamping ground, *he* held the whip, *he* would make the final decision.

But no, Harris thought. This is *my* son. If I move now—

Harris paused on the brink of action. He struggled with the instinct to kill. What was the matter with this man? Couldn't even his insensitive mind foresee what Rich would some day become? Would this evil man really eliminate so much promise, so much potential? Was there no speck of pity in the man that he should choose this vile manner of destruction, face to face, with such utter callousness, permitting no recourse for his victim?

Rich, Jr. shot him an agonized glance. Under the harsh, ego-destroying, hammering voice of their Inquisitor he could hear the boy's silent, pitiful plea, *"Help me, Dad."*

Then suddenly—Harris named him clearly in his mind—the *assassin* stood up and moved toward the boy. Their time had run out.

Civilization dropped from Harris in an instant. He jumped to his feet. He rushed to his son and with one deft, desperate clutch had him out of the chair and stumbling toward the door. As he threw the door open and pushed Rich safely through, he heard a gasp behind him.

Harris turned slowly, with a terrible calm. The blood rushed through his veins in icy fury, for now as far as he was concerned his adversary was weaponless. Others might cringe helplessly before this arbiter of their fates, but not *this* father.

As the man stood before him, shocked by the violence and speed of his move, Harris raised his head high—and destroyed him.

"Dean Sonderfield," he said, "after your inept, imperceptive, murderous interview here today, I wouldn't have my son attend this university even if you *did* accept him!"

He closed the door to the Admissions Office firmly behind him, and Richmond Harris and his grateful son left the ivy-covered building forever.

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***Winner of a* SECOND PRIZE**
***in* CWA *contest***
**CELIA FREMLIN**

*We are delighted to welcome Celia Fremlin to EQMM. Her first appearance is an unusual story, one of the five winners of Second Prizes in the EQMM-CWA (Crime Writers Association) short-story contest . . .*

*Celia Fremlin was raised in the little Kentish village of Ryarsh. She won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, where she received a B.A. and a B.Litt. In 1959 her novel,* THE HOURS BEFORE DAWN, *won the Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" for the best mystery novel of the preceding year. Her other novels include* WAIT FOR THE WEDDING, THE TROUBLE MAKERS, *and* THE JEALOUS ONE.

*And now we give you Miss Fremlin's unusual prize-winning story —unusual, you will see, for EQMM too. "The Special Gift" has an Alice-in-Wonderland quality of quiet terror: be prepared for a* cauld grue, *for a* frisson d'horreur . . .

# THE SPECIAL GIFT

*by CELIA FREMLIN*

EILEEN GLANCED DISCONSOLATELY at the little group cowering round the fire in her big, cold sitting room. Only five of them tonight. It was the weather, of course, that was keeping most of the members away; not everyone was willing to battle through wind and sleet just for the pleasure of reading aloud to one another their amateur attempts at writing, and receiving some equally amateur criticism.

Still, thought Eileen, drawing her cardigan more tightly about her, it was a pity; these meetings weren't nearly so much fun with only a few. A crowd might have made it seem a bit warmer, too.

"Well, do you think we ought to begin, Mr. Wilberforce?" she said, sitting down on the big horsehair ottoman next to the secretary.

Mr. Wilberforce, a plump, important-looking man in his fifties, glanced at the clock, rubbing his pink hands together.



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"Only twenty past," he said. "Better give them a *few* more minutes. The snow, you know—buses—"

"*I* think we should start," piped up old Mrs. Peterkin, peering out like a little aggrieved mouse from the depths of the fur coat she had refused to take off. "We've got a lot to get through this evening. I've brought one of my little tales of unrequited love, if you'd care to hear it. And I'm sure Miss Williams here"—she indicated a pleasant, vacantly smiling girl on her right—"I'm sure Miss Williams has brought us another chapter of her psychological novel. And Mr. Walters"—the pale young man lowered his eyelashes self-consciously—"we hope Mr. Walters is going to read us another of his Ballads of the Seasons. It'll be summer this time, won't it, Mr. Walters?"

"Yes, it will be summer," agreed Mr. Walters, speaking rapidly and staring at the carpet. "But not summer in the *conventional* sense, you understand. Now, *my* interpretation of summer—"

A sharp, imperative ring at the front door brought Eileen to her feet, and she hurried eagerly out of the room. One more makes six, she was thinking, that's not too bad; all the same, I wish I hadn't made all those cheese sandwiches . . .

A gust of wind and snow swirled into her face as she opened the front door, and the little dark man seemed almost to be blown in by it, so slight and thin in his dark coat.

"You haven't been to these meetings before, have you?" Eileen was beginning—and then stopped, for in the dimness of the hall the stranger seemed to be staring at her with a delighted recognition.

"We—we *haven't* met before, have we?" she went on awkwardly; and the little man seemed to rouse himself.

"Why—er—no," he said hastily, shaking the snow from his boots onto the doormat. "No, indeed, I assure you! I just—well, I had a feeling—"

Again he stared at her with that odd look of recognition in his eyes; and for some reason Eileen began to feel uncomfortable; for some reason she became very eager to escape the piercing gaze of this stranger in the dimly lit hall.

"Come along and meet the others," she said nervously, and led him briskly into the sitting room.

"Fitzroy is my name," the dark man introduced himself. "*Alan* Fitzroy."

He glanced round the company with dark, sparkling eyes, and there was a little stir of interest. Not that anybody had ever heard of him, but something in the way he spoke made them feel that perhaps they *ought* to have heard of him. Perhaps, each of them was thinking, perhaps this at last is the real writer I have always hoped would turn up! The *real* writer who not only gets his own work published, but who will be able to tell me how to

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get *mine* published; who will recognize it as the fine work it really is . . .

With such thoughts behind them, five pairs of eyes followed the little man as he moved toward the fire; eager hands drew up a comfortable armchair for him; eager voices plied him with questions.

But Alan Fitzroy was not very communicative. No, he didn't know any of the members of this group. No (modestly) he didn't write much—well, not *very* much. No, he hadn't brought anything to read—well, not really—anyway, let everyone else read something first, *please!*

And so the meeting began. Alan Fitzroy sat motionless, his eyes closed. To everyone's disappointment he took no part in the comments and criticisms that followed each reading, and it was only when he was asked for *his* contribution that he roused himself.

"Well," he admitted, "I *have* brought a little thing. Actually, it's part of a larger work. I'm writing my autobiography, you see."

He looked round the room expectantly, and there was an almost audible sigh of disappointment. This, somehow, didn't sound like a real writer; it sounded much more like an ordinary member of the group. However—

"I want you to understand," the stranger continued, "that the whole object of my book is to bring the reader into real contact with my ego—to draw him, or her, into the life of my mind in a way which I believe has never been done before . . ."

As he spoke, he fixed his brilliant eyes on Eileen's face, and again she felt a little flicker of uneasiness—or was it even fear? Quite irrational, anyway, she assured herself; there couldn't possibly be a more harmless little man; and she settled herself to listen as he began to read from a thick, dog-eared manuscript.

"The self-doubt and self-awareness of any repressed, frustrated childhood . . ."

The voice went on and on. At intervals Eileen glanced at the clock. She hoped that Mr. Fitzroy wouldn't be offended if she went out and made the tea before he had finished. She hoped, too, that he hadn't noticed that Mrs. Peterkin was asleep inside her fur coat and might at any moment begin to snore.

Mr. Wilberforce, at Eileen's side, was fiercely making notes on the back of one of his own manuscripts. No doubt he was building up a pungent criticism of the weary verbiage through which this poor little man was plowing.

"Go easy with him!" whispered Eileen softly; somehow it seemed very important to her that nothing should be said to upset the newcomer. "Remember he's new." But Mr. Wilberforce only nodded his head irritably and went on writing.

Wasn't it *ever* coming to an end?

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But listen! At last! Those, surely, must be the concluding sentences:

"To point the significance of these psychodynamic disturbances to my infantile ego, I must relate a nocturnal hallucination from which I used to suffer. Or, in common parlance, a dream. I dreamed I was walking along a passage, a long stone passage, my feet clanging as I went, as if I were wearing boots of steel or armor or something like that. At the end of the passage I knew I should find my cradle—the cradle I'd had as a baby—and I should have to get into it and lie down. And I knew that as I lay there, I would see a face slowly rising over the side of the cradle, and the face would be mad. I never knew what would happen next, because I always woke up—in fact, I always woke up before I had even reached the end of the passage."

Abruptly the little man laid down his manuscript. He looked round triumphantly, and there was a little embarrassed silence, broken by a snore from Mrs. Peterkin.

"Well," said Eileen at last, wondering how to avoid hurting the little man's feelings. "It's a very *profound* piece of work, of course—"

"But it's too *long!*" exploded Mr. Wilberforce. "And too self-centered, too self pitying! You've used the word 'I' eighty-seven times in the first six pages! I was counting!"

Alan Fitzroy turned on him indignantly.

"But I *have* to use the word 'I'! The whole book is about myself—I told you! The idea is to get the reader involved with *me*—to bring him right into my very mind, if you understand me—"

"I understand you perfectly," said Mr. Wilberforce heavily, ignoring Eileen's nudges. "The idea is far from being a novel one. But if you will allow me to say so, I think you are deceiving yourself. You speak of bringing the reader right into your mind, and in fact you don't even interest him. The whole thing is too wordy, too abstract. There's nothing in it to grip the attention."

The little man flushed angrily.

"Nothing to grip the attention?" he cried. "What about that dream, eh? Doesn't *that* grip your attention? Doesn't it?"

"Frankly, no," answered Mr. Wilberforce. "It's simply an account of a childish nightmare such as all of us have had at one time or another. I appreciate that it may have frightneed you as a child, but believe me, it won't frighten anyone else!"

The little man was trembling with rage now.

"It *will* frighten people!" he almost screamed. "It *will!* I have a special gift for this sort of thing, I *know* I have! Let me tell you, a person once died of fright from hearing that dream!"

There was an awkward little silence. No one knew what to say to that absurd boast. Eileen got hastily to her feet.

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"I think we all need a cup of tea!" she said, loudly and brightly, and escaped from the room. As she hurried down the passage to the kitchen, she became aware that Audrey Williams, the young psychological novelist, was following her.

"Thought I might help you, dear," explained Audrey, and added, as she piled cups and saucers onto a tray, "Whoever is that pompous little ass, do you suppose?"

"I can't think," said Eileen. "I felt rather sorry for him, really. He must have worked terribly hard on all that stuff, you know. He had chapters and chapters of it written."

"You're telling me!" giggled Audrey. "I thought at one point that he was proposing to read the whole lot! I nearly died . . ." Her voice trailed away, and both women were aware of Alan Fitzroy standing silently in the doorway.

"Funny you should say that," he said, looking straight at Audrey. "And you?" he went on, turning to Eileen. "Did *you* nearly die, too?"

Eileen flushed. No wonder the poor little chap was bitter! It was shameful of Mr. Wilberforce to have laced into a newcomer like that!

She said gently, "Don't take too much notice of Mr. Wilberforce. He's a very stern critic. He's like that to all of us sometimes, isn't he, Audrey?"

Audrey Williams nodded dumbly; and Alan Fitzroy spoke again, addressing himself to Eileen.

"And what did *you* think of my little effort? I sense a certain sympathy in you. Were you impressed by my dream?"

"Why—yes—" lied Eileen nervously, searching for words. "I thought it was quite—well, quite unusual. If you'd brought it in a bit *sooner,* though, instead of quite so much theory in the beginning—"

"But I *do* bring it in sooner!" exclaimed the little man eagerly—he seemed to have quite recovered his temper. "I bring it in all through the book—just as it has come to me at intervals all through my life. But the reader doesn't know why I keep repeating it until the last episode! Don't you think that's a good idea? Keeping him in suspense, that kind of thing?"

He glanced with pathetic eagerness from one to the other of the two women; and Eileen, anxious to show the poor fellow a little encouragement, paused in fanning biscuits on a plate to say, "Do tell us: what *is* the last episode?"

"Oh, well, you see, it was like this. This dream used to worry me, it really did. I'm not a nervous man—that is to say, my *type* of nerves, as I explain in—"

Hastily Eileen brought him back to the point.

"But the dream?" she said, counting out teaspoons onto the tray, and Alan Fitzroy continued, "Yes, yes. The dream. What worried me, you see, was that each time I dreamed it I got *little* farther down the pas-

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sage toward the cradle, where I knew I would have to lie down and see the Face. In the end I was so worried about it that I told my wife. 'If only you could be with me, my dear,' I said—just in fun, you understand—'Then I wouldn't be so scared.'

"Well, that very night I dreamed it again, and, believe it or not, she *was* there! She was walking along in front of me, wearing her old dark dressing gown. She was a big woman, my wife—a big strong woman, and she quite blocked my view of the cradle—the cradle where I knew the madness would begin. So I felt quite safe. I didn't mind the dream a bit. And when I woke up"—

The little man looked eagerly from Eileen to Audrey, like a conjuror bringing off a successful trick. "When I woke up, what do you think my wife told me?"

"Why, that she'd had the dream too, of course!" said Audrey promptly—wasn't that the obvious climax to the tale?

But Alan Fitzroy shook his head. "No," he said. "No, that didn't come till later. No, she told me that as she lay there, her head near to mine, she heard what she thought was my watch ticking under my pillow. But a funny, metallic tick, she said—like a far-off clanging of armor, or of steel boots. And then she knew that it didn't come from under the pillow but from inside my head. It was my boots clanging in my dream, you see, and she'd heard them."

Eileen and Audrey had drawn close together. Eileen's voice trembled a little.

"I think we ought to take the tea in—" she began; but the little man laid his hand on her arm beseechingly.

"Just one moment more!" he begged. "Just a few more words! After that, whenever I dreamed that dream, my wife would hear the clanging in my head, louder each night, until at last *she* had the dream, too! The clanging somehow forced her to go to sleep, she told me, though she tried hard to stay awake—and there she was, she said, right in my dream, walking down the passage in front of me, hearing my boots clanging behind her. What do you think of that?"

Eileen had recovered herself. Of course, this was just a piece of fiction on which he wanted her opinion. Mr. Wilberforce's crushing comments on the autobiography had stung him into trying to enliven it.

"Well," she said consideringly. "I suppose you could work that up into something quite dramatic. But however would you end it?"

"The way it *did* end, of course!" said the little man sharply. "It ended with my wife actually getting into the cradle. Naturally. It was *my* dream, wasn't it, and I *made* it end that way. Though there were one or two terrible struggles first. I told

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you, my wife was a big strong woman."

"And—and what happens to her in it?" asked Eileen. "Does she see the face? And does she tell you afterwards what it was like?"

"Oh, no!" said the little man, sounding surprised. "Of course not. She couldn't *tell* me any more after she'd got into the cradle. Naturally. She wasn't dead, but she was an imbecile by then. I found her in bed in the morning, all curled up as she would have to be to fit into this little cradle, and she could no longer talk. Naturally. That *would* be the effect of looking at the Face."

Eileen and Audrey glanced at each other. Each noticed that the other had gone rather white; but the little man went cheerfully on, apparently unaware of their dismay.

"They took her away, of course, and put her into some sort of home. But it was all right—I knew I was safe now, because if *she* was in the cradle, then of course *I* couldn't be, could I? Every time I had the dream there she was, filling up the whole cradle in her dark dressing gown so that I couldn't even see it. I felt wonderfully safe for months.

"Until, one night, she wasn't there any more. That was terrible for me. I knew then she must be dead—and sure enough the next day I had word from the Home that this was the case. But come—" he seemed suddenly to rouse himself —"I mustn't keep you ladies from your tea—allow me!" And taking one of the two trays he hurried off to the sitting room.

Eileen and Audrey had only one thought—to get back to their companions. Hastily they loaded the other tray and a few moments later they were in the sitting room.

To their surprise Alan Fitzroy was no longer there.

"Oh, he left as soon as he'd brought the tray in," explained Mr. Wilberforce. "Said he had to catch a train to Guildford, or somewhere. Asked me to apologize to you—why, what's the matter with you?"

Eileen recounted briefly the story that Alan Fitzroy had told them in the kitchen, and Mr. Wilberforce looked grave.

"Fellow must be crazy!" he said. "I *thought* he looked funny. Wouldn't have let him go if I'd known. Should have kept him, and rung the police."

"Oh, I'm only too thankful he *has* gone!" said Eileen. "I don't want a fuss. Besides, he *must* have meant it as fiction—though even so, he must be a *bit* abnormal to try—"

"Abnormal? Of *course* he was abnormal!" interrupted old Mrs. Peterkin. "I could see *that* the very first moment! 'That's an Egalomaniac!' I said to myself—"

"Egomaniac," corrected Audrey Williams, who was well up in the jargon needed for her novel. "Or do you mean megalomaniac—?"

The chatter went on, and the clink of tea cups, and Eileen felt more and more thankful that the

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strange little man had gone. Suppose he had been the *last* to go instead of the first? She couldn't very well have forced him out—

Eleven o'clock now. One by one the members left, and finally Eileen was alone.

"I must get all this cleared up," she thought, glancing wearily round the untidy room; and she began to move about collecting ashtrays and dirty cups. As she passed the ottoman she noticed that Mr. Wilberforce had left his gloves there; and so she was not surprised when a moment later the front doorbell rang urgently.

But it was not Mr. Wilberforce. The little dark figure had slipped past her into the hall before she had properly taken in what was happening.

She gave a little gasp of horror—and then recovered herself. After all, he seemed a very innocuous little man, standing there under the hall light and asking if he could look at a timetable. He had missed his last train, he said, but maybe—on the other line—perhaps a connection at Croydon—if he might just study the timetable a moment?

Eileen had no alternative but to lead him into the sitting room and hand him the ABC. He settled himself in the armchair with it and was soon thumbing through its pages with apparent concentration. Eileen went on with her tidying, trying to appear quite unperturbed. After all, she was saying to herself, what can he *do*? I'm twice his size, a big strong woman—

Where had she heard that phrase before? The words echoed in her head—"My wife . . . a big strong woman."

It was then that she noticed how quiet everything was. The rustling of the pages of the ABC had ceased; and when she looked across at him, Eileen saw that Alan Fitzroy was asleep. His head was leaning back against the chair, his mouth was open, and his face was rather white.

"He looks queer!" she thought, stepping closer. "I think perhaps I *will* ring the police. Luckily the phone's in the kitchen, not in here, so it won't wake him—"

And then she heard the noise. At first she thought it was a clicking in his throat, the prelude to a snore. But no, it wasn't a click; it was a tiny clanking noise—distant—metallic—inside his head.

Eileen did not stop to put down the tray she was carrying. The telephone! The telephone! That was the only idea in her mind as she hurried through the door and started for the kitchen.

But how loud the clanking sound had grown! It seemed to be following her out of the room—along the passage—clank—*clank*—*CLANK*—

And where *was* the kitchen? How had this passage grown so long? And why were the walls of stone, and the floor too—stone that echoed to the clanking footsteps behind her—

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She could not look behind. She could only hurry on, and on and on, down the echoing passage, until in front of her she saw the end. The delicate muslin frills, stirred ever so slightly by an unseen breath. The lacy pillow, white and waiting. The coverlet, just recently turned back, in readiness, by an unseen hand.

With a strength she never knew she possessed, Eileen made herself stand still.

"It's a dream, it's a dream!" she told herself. "If I won't go with it, I'll wake up! I *won't* go with it! I won't! I won't! I *won't!*"

The clanking feet behind came nearer. Hands were pushing—pushing—fighting with her, and Eileen fought back—with that dim, strengthless fighting of dreams, which yet somehow takes all a person's strength and more—I won't! gasped Eileen silently. I won't, I won't, I *won't!*

A crash seemed to split her eardrums, and she found she could open her eyes. She opened them on her own kitchen, on the tray of crockery lying smashed at her feet. Sweat was running down her face, and tears of relief came into her eyes.

A dream, of course! A sleepwalking dream brought on by that awful little man, and perhaps by overtiredness. Why, it must have been part of the dream that he ever came back to ask for a timetable at all! Light-hearted in her relief, Eileen hurried back to the sitting room.

No. That at least hadn't been a dream. But Alan Fitzroy was no longer sitting upright in his chair. He was sprawled on the floor as if he had been struck down in a violent fight, and blood was trickling from his head where it had struck the fireplace fender in his fall.

For one insane moment Eileen thought of that dream struggle at the edge of the cradle—*one* of them had had to fall—and then, collecting her wits, she rushed to telephone the doctor . . .

The doctor felt the little man's pulse, his heart; then he shook his head.

"Not a hope, I'm afraid," he said. "You'll have to phone the police, my dear, and get them to find out where he comes from and everything. You go and phone them now, while I attend to the poor fellow."

But why was Eileen still standing there, motionless?

"Go on—phone!" said the doctor irritably. It was bad enough to be called out to a fatal heart attack at this time of night, without a hysterical woman delaying things. "Go on, the telephone!"

As if in a trance, Eileen moved toward the door—along the passage toward the kitchen. After all, perhaps it had been the doctor's watch chain making that tiny clanking noise. Yes, he must still be rattling his watch chain now—louder—*louder—LOUDER—*

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***Winner of a* SECOND PRIZE**
***in* CWA *contest***

**GUY CULLINGFORD**

*Guy Cullingford's "Something To Get At Quick" is a winner of one of the five Second Prizes awarded in the EQMM-CWA (Crime Writers Association) short-story contest. It is a story of juvenile delinquency in London, and it is told with great understanding and compassion. It moved us, and we hope you will be moved too . . .*

# SOMETHING TO GET AT QUICK

*by GUY CULLINGFORD*

ALL OF US CARRIED KNIVES. YOU want something you can get at quick if another gang starts in with the rough stuff, and brass knucks and bicycle chains are out. They count against you just as bad and you can't get rid of 'em in a hurry. An empty milk bottle's fine but not always there when you need it.

No, knives are best. All the same, if it came to a showdown, we never did more than nick a bit of skin here and there, just the same as they did to us. We never meant to use 'em to hurt anyone real bad. It was more for the look of it if you know what I mean. Until that night . . .

We'd been round the pubs and we'd all had a few beers—well, you know what, it was Saturday night and we were flush; and when we came out of The Grapes, we were feeling larky and there were these two girls who'd been hanging around for what they could get—so I reckon it was our turn. It was dark up that end of the street and we'd got them in the middle of us and started to poke at them a bit—nothing rough really—and then someone went a bit further and one of these Judies began to scream as if no one had ever touched her before.

All of a sudden there was this chap turned up from nowhere ready to put on a gallant rescue act. The first we knew, he'd hurled himself at us and was pummeling and kicking as if he was half a dozen and bawling at the top of his voice for help. Being as we had our backs to him and weren't expecting it, we went down like a bunch of skittles, girls and all, and there we were in a great sprawling heap with this chap somewhere on the top. The Ju-



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dies screeched in earnest, there was a lot of heavy breathing, and then someone yelled, "Stick him! Stick the interfering son-of-a—"

Then just as soon it was all over. We sorted ourselves out and scrambled up somehow, including the girls. Except him. He was down on his knees with his back humped over and his head on the road. At least, that's what it looked like by the shape; you couldn't see him that clear, though every door of the pub was open and light was streaming out—and so were the jerks from inside. Someone blew a whistle—the landlord I shouldn't wonder—and Flip called out, "Scarper, you nits, and ditch the hardware!" and set off running like hell towards home.

So I got off too—we'd always planned to scatter in case of an emergency—and didn't stop to see what happened to the others. My way home was the same as Flip's but I didn't catch up with him as I wasn't going straight there. Far as I know there was no one after me, but I ran as if there was, and my idea was to make for the river and do what Flip had always said to do. All those streets are badly lighted with patches of dark between one lamppost and the next, but they weren't like places I'd never been in and I ran like a streak not thinking of anything except the nearest way to the bridge.

I got a stitch in my side like a kid, but I didn't stop for that. Lucky there was no one about. Saturday night all the people who lived in those rows of houses were either out somewhere or stuck round the telly. But I might have met up with a pair of flatties on the beat or a squad car rushing up *Zuppt* to the scene of the —well, where it had been happening.

When I came to the bridge I stopped to catch my breath, looked round to see if I was alone, and then let the knife slip over the side to keep company with the fishes. Then I began to wonder what the others had done with theirs, and other things besides. I wondered if we shouldn't have stayed put to see if the chap was hurt bad. Or maybe—

Funny, but you get into the way of doing what Flip says without any argument—he was always the one to have his say even at school. It was too late to do different, so I went on home, and when I opened the sitting-room door, it was like it always was with the pair of them glued by their noses to the telly and half dark in there same as it was in the streets outside. Whatever it was on the screen, even the commercials, my dad didn't like to be interrupted, but my mum turned her head towards me and then back again before she said, "Oh, there you are, Bernie. Move round a bit, Jim, let Bernie have a look too. It's one of those nasty thrillers you like so much, dear."

But I'd had enough thrillers for

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one night, so I went up and on to bed.

On Sunday mornings we usually lie in late like the rest of the people who live round us, but a little after eight someone chucked a pebble up at my bedroom window and I went over to see who it was and found Flip looking up. I couldn't let him into our house 'cause my dad won't have it, but Flip knew that and he made signs for me to come on down. When I saw him close up, I saw he looked as if he'd slept about as much as I had and the first thing he said was, "He's dead."

"How d'you know?"

"Radio."

So we went round to his place, only two streets away from ours but a lot more slummy, and parked ourselves in the shed in his yard which we'd done before when we wanted to be to ourselves.

When we'd lit up butts to calm our nerves, I said, "Maybe they won't pitch on us."

I didn't believe it, but I was still in hopes. Where it happened wasn't our usual stamping ground and we might have been a bit rowdy in the pub, but we hadn't actually started anything in there.

"Haven't you forgotten the Judies?" he asked with a sneer.

"They don't know our names."

"Oh, hell, Bernie, use what brains you've got. They may not be all that bright but they can give a description, can't they? We'll be picked up this morning for sure. Wonder it hasn't happened already. I'd like to get on to the others but it's too risky."

"What good 'ud that be?"

"I'd tell 'em to keep their traps shut—or else. If no one blabs, no one's going to know which of us did it, are they? Then we'll all get the same medicine."

My throat went dry. "God! My dad . . . what'll it be, Flip?"

He shrugged. "Can't tell. Depends on who's dishing it out."

But I knew that whatever happened to the rest of us, Flip would go to prison for a cert through being older and having been in trouble with the police before. He knew it too. I could see by his face. He blew out a mouthful of smoke and then he took me by the arm and twisted it just to make sure I was listening.

"Bernie, you've got to hold your tongue. What ever happens. Give me your solemn oath."

He made me swear it. I tell you, you don't argue with Flip. Sometimes he can be pretty terrifying. The most I dared do was ask a question.

"Was it you called out 'Stick him'?"

"I don't know who it was," he said scowling. "And if anyone wants to know, no more do you."

After a few minutes of talk I left him and went back home and into the kitchen where my mum was in her dressing gown and slippers

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making a pot of tea to take upstairs.

"Hullo, Bernie. Where've you sprung from? Up early, aren't you? Well, you can get your own breakfast, I'm not doing it. You can have a fry-up if you like. There's eggs in the pantry."

But I didn't feel like eggs—or a fry-up.

Flip was right, just as he always was. It was going on noon when two busies arrived in plain clothes. My dad was in his shirt sleeves with his trousers held up by his stomach. They saw him first in the front room. I could hear them talking in there from down the passage that leads to the back door. I thought of slipping out through it, but I knew it wasn't any good. Besides, it was mostly my dad I heard as he'd begun to shout. Then he came out looking like thunder.

"Bernie!"

"Yes, Dad."

"Come on in here."

He hadn't got his belt on him—that was one comfort.

"Whatever have you been up to, Bernie?" whimpered my mum, but once I was inside he slammed the door on her.

"Now then," he said, "And I want no lies. These here are police officers. They tell me you were out with a gang of boys last night and between you, you stabbed a young feller who's since died. Are they right, or are they wrong?"

The words wouldn't come out. In the end I just nodded. It didn't make sense, but it was the best I could do. And it was good enough for him. He's got big hands and when I nodded they dropped to his sides. Then they came up again with the thick fingers curling and he said in a growl, "By God, I'll kill you for this."

"Calm down, Mr. Carter," advised the detective. "We haven't heard the whole tale yet. And this is a case for the law, not private vengeance. Stay if you like but you'll have to restrain yourself while I find out from your son exactly what happened last night. Notebook, Pate. No need to be scared, Bernie—that's what they call you, isn't it? Short for Bernard, Pate. *My* name's Detective Sergeant Davis. First we want a few facts about you to put us in the picture. How old are you for a start?"

"Going on eighteen."

"He's seventeen and four months," muttered my dad.

"Right. And how many jobs have you had since you left school?"

"Just the one. I'm at Woodthorpe's."

"Doing what?"

"I'm in the packing shed."

"Not much of a job for a bright boy, is it?"

"He isn't bright," chipped in my dad. "I got it for him and see that he keeps it. They pay him a damn sight more than he's worth."

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"Then you're to blame for letting him get in with a group of young hoodlums too tough for him."

"Me! I'm always at him for hanging around with Flip Harris and that scum."

"Dad!"

"All right, Bernie," soothed the sergeant. "Don't worry. He's not giving anything away. You're the last on the list—we've already rounded up the others. Soon as we've got one pinned down it's child's play to come up with the rest of the gang. Ask any local cop. It's only a matter of identification now. You'll have to come down to the station yourself when we're ready to leave. Come on, lad, let's have it. Just start at the beginning and go straight on to the end. Your own words—I shan't hustle you."

I couldn't get out of it, so I had to tell him how it began with us all at the pub and I could see my dad's face swelling with rage though he's not above going to the boozer whenever he can tear himself away from the telly. Of course I'm under age for beer drinking, but they don't ask for your birth certificate when you go up to the bar for a pint. I'm not big like my dad but I'm not a dwarf either, no matter what he thinks.

I told it on the level right up to the part where we had the girls in the middle teasing them and the stranger crashed in on us bringing everyone down in a heap. Then I dried up and wouldn't go any further though I said "No" when the sergeant asked me if I was in the habit of carrying a knife. I knew all the others would say the same thing and what came next proved it.

He put on a sarcastic voice and said, "Funny. Yet the poor bloke died from a stab wound. No one admits to having a knife, but he's stabbed to death all the same. Perhaps it's suicide."

"One wound, is that what you say?" asked my dad sharply.

"Well, one was enough. It finished him."

"And no other cuts?"

"Who's asking the questions here?" But the tone gave him away and my dad soon catches on when he wants to. He said, "Why didn't you tell me it's only one boy you're after?"

"Only one boy for murder. There may be other charges."

"But the rest of them did nothing but stand around in a ring until this fellow jumped in and they all fell down. Like the nursery game. He set on them, they never set on him." He swung round on me and whipped out, "Who did it, eh, Bernie? Who was the one used the knife?" He had his eyes glued to me, so had the other two.

"There!" he said, pleased as punch with his own cleverness. "Did you see that, Sergeant? *He* knows. You leave him with me for ten minutes and I'll have it out of him."

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"That isn't the way we do things," said the sergeant.

"Oh, isn't it? It's the way some of you do it and the best way, I'm thinking. Saves a lot of time and trouble."

The sergeant gave him a long hard stare and then turned it on me.

"If you do know anything, my boy, better get it off your chest. It's your duty and it'll be to your advantage. This isn't school where you don't split on your friends. A sense of loyalty isn't to be sneered at, but it doesn't apply in this case."

"Loyalty, my foot!" exclaimed my dad. "He isn't loyal, he's just scared silly of that Flip."

"You'll be taken care of, my boy, never fear. I'm putting the question to you straight: do you know anything we don't know and if so, what?"

"It was too dark to see," I muttered sulkily. By now I had a clear picture of Flip's face as I'd seen it last in the shed this morning. It *was* this morning though it seemed years and years ago.

"If you could see the gals, you could see a knife," said my dad.

"All depends where he was when they went down," put in the constable with the notebook. The sergeant didn't thank him for this help. The constable got back to his pothooks and the detective swung off in another direction.

"What were you wearing last night, Bernie?"

"Same as I've got on now."

He asked my dad, "Is that right?"

My dad shrugged. "Ask his mum. She takes more notice. He ain't got a whole row of suits on hangers, but he might have another jacket."

"It's cold at night still. Didn't you have on some sort of a coat, Bernie?"

"I got a leather jacket. Well, imitation . . ."

"Pate, just go and ask Mrs. Carter for the rest of the boy's outdoor clothing, will you? Oh, and a pair of pajamas and some washing things. He'll be staying the night with us. Now, don't frighten the poor woman—she's got enough to put up with already."

After his mate had gone he relaxed a bit and said to my dad sort of man to man. "Nasty job this. I don't get a kick out of it. But we have to sort it out. A poor young chap's dead who never did anyone a stroke of harm. I'm sorry your boy's involved."

"He got in with bad company," said my dad, fumbling for his pipe.

"Yeah. You'll have to put yourself out—take a bit more trouble."

"I pay the rent and the rates. I do a hard day's work with overtime. A bloke's got to have some time to get what he can out of this stinking life."

"You shouldn't take on responsibility if you can't handle it," said the sergeant.

"I give him plenty of strap."

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"You don't get comfort out of strap," said the sergeant.

They never said any more after that, just sat there sunk in their own thoughts as if I didn't exist. But when Pate returned with my clothes in the tatty suitcase I use when we go away, the sergeant brisked up and said, "Well, come along, Bernie, we'll get down to the station to join your pals. I don't suppose you'll be away too long but you might as well say goodbye to your mum. Far as I know they'll be charged and brought before the magistrate tomorrow," he told my dad in an aside. "You'd better be there, chum."

"Oh, Bernie!" said my mum. She'd got herself dressed but didn't look as if she'd washed or done her hair properly. I could smell the Sunday joint cooking in the oven.

"Can't he stay for his dinner?" she said.

"No, ma'am, I'm afraid not. I'll see he has something down there, so don't worry."

Even the smell made me feel sick. I couldn't have eaten a bite.

"Well, goodbye, mum."

I never liked kissing her, but this time I got wet on my mouth as I pecked at her cheek. She looked pasty as if she never got enough fresh air, though she went out to work and earned enough to keep herself going at Bingo.

They had the car parked outside, just a small car like any other, and I went in the back with the sergeant while the constable drove. The sergeant didn't even put his hand on me while I was getting in. My mum and dad didn't come out on the pavement to see me off but I did see the curtain move.

It didn't take us more than five minutes to get down there and after we'd seen the chap at the desk I was put by myself in a small room —well, I suppose it was a cell really, though it didn't look much different from my bedroom at home, only cleaner. I didn't see any of the others, but I supposed they were somewhere nearby.

Soon after, a cop in uniform brought me a tray with two sandwiches and a carton of coffee from a machine.

It was a funny sort of Sunday. It was so damn quiet in there, like you were all alone in the world. The electric light was on—the window was barred and too high up in the wall to be much use. I drank some of the coffee and it was sweet and nasty. The sandwiches looked okay, but I didn't try them.

I didn't know what the others had said or whether they had anything to say, but even without Flip to bear down on them I guessed they wouldn't talk. It was Flip's gang and he'd got us well-trained. We'd heard often enough what he thought of squealers. I wondered why nothing had come up about the yell, and as I was the last to be questioned, it was pretty plain that the girls hadn't even heard it.

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I didn't want to think about the chap who was dead but I couldn't help it. He'd had no time for regrets; he'd gone before he'd made up his mind to anything, even before he'd had a chance to kick himself for interfering in something which wasn't his business. And where did he get to after all that? Up in the sky along with the spacemen? Or ghosting it in the churchyard? Or just nowhere, which was what most of us would bet on. Had he got a mum and dad like mine? Or were his different? Were they upset when they heard what had happened to him? Even mine were upset. Would Flip's be upset as well?

Seeing we all had knives and were supposed to be ready to use them, I couldn't think why there should only be this one stab—one stab deep enough to kill. Was it because it was all such a mess and a muddle and over too quick? Or just because out of all of us there was only one chap ready to go the whole hog when it came to it? Out of that whole bunch of toughies, only one who was genuinely dangerous.

I thought a long while about Flip—whether he was good or bad, or just a mix-up of the two. I wondered how he'd get on in prison when what he couldn't stand was being shut in and made to do what he didn't like. If he'd been the one to lead me wrong, he'd been the first person to make me feel I was as good as the rest and not just a nobody who came into the house after a day's sweat and looked at the telly and then went up to bed. I owed him a debt for that and for the fun we'd had together, but I couldn't go on forever doing what Flip told me to do. He wasn't going to like it, but he'd made something of me that had to go out on its own and do what it had decided for itself.

I'd been going over it for a long time, yet there seemed to be ages to wait until the chap came in for my tray. He raised his eyebrows when he saw the two sandwiches still on the plate.

Then I said "Is Sergeant Davis about?"

"He's about all right," he said, "grim as you like."

"Then tell him I want to see him right away."

He raised his eyebrows again before he went out of the door without speaking.

I sat there trying to kid myself that I'd feel better when I'd got it over, that Flip would forgive me for coming clean.

You see, I knew all along who'd done it. Me.

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**Two *NEW* stories by members of MWA (Mystery Writers of America)**

*Old Josiah Schonfeldt was the retired Chief of the Homicide Squad. A reminiscence for a magazine article? Something special? Well, there was the Issachar Lampert case—you remember Issachar Lampert, the Texas oil-and-cattle multimillionaire? No? Well, it happened 20 years ago, and it was the most exciting case in Schonfeldt's detective career. And it was a baffler, no question about it. . . .*

# THE IMPERSONATION MURDER CASE

*by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD*

OH, COME ON NOW, YOUNG FELlow, what is there in a retired Chief of a Homicide Squad worth a magazine article? Oh, sure, I've had interesting things happen in the 37 years I was with the force, but most of it was pure routine. Well, if you put it that way, I guess I'm vain enough to tell you about one or two of them. But you'll have to let me do it my own way—I never was interviewed before, except in the way of business, you might say, by the newspaper boys. Leave your dog in the garden and come in and make yourself comfortable. Let me have your coat.

Well, I guess the case I'll never forget was the one I called "The Impersonation Murder Case." I'll bet you never heard of it—long before your time. But 20 years ago it was a big story, some of which never got in the papers. And that was a case where I really was of some use—anyway, one man thought so, and thinks so yet. I get a dozen bottles of good bourbon from him every Christmas. That reminds me: have a drink? Later, then.

Here, let me show you. I never was stuck enough on myself to keep a scrapbook, but the Missus did, and I can't claim I ever went out of my way to stop her. See this clipping? Read the headline. "'I Only Did My Duty,' says Schonfeldt."

This thing started when Issachar Lampert was murdered. Ever hear of him? In his day he was noted for two things—he was the richest man in this state, and the worst-tempered. Everybody kowtowed to him, but everybody hated him—well, maybe not his wife, till she'd been married to him two weeks or



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so. They had just one child—a son named Gordon—and he never pretended not to hate his father. They were on the outs from the time the kid could walk and talk, and finally when the boy was 20 they had one big bang-up fight and his father ordered him out of the house forever. Yes, like an old melodrama—never darken my door again.

Naturally he was only too glad to go, though he was still at school and had no training to earn a living. He was mad at his mother, too, for not taking his part, so he packed his bags and left, just like that, and vanished into nothingness. She'd have seen that he was well supplied with money if she'd only known where he was: she adored him. But it was 15 years before she knew whether he was alive or dead; and the private detective she hired to try to find him had to give it up as a bad job.

At least that was her story. I have to tell this the way it came to me. Anyway, there was no doubt on earth that her son was the one person she really loved.

Issachar Lampert was found in his study in that big suburban palace they called a house on the morning of November 19th. One of the maids found him—the servants were the only people who got up early in that establishment. She noticed the light under his study door, knocked, got no answer, took a chance on opening it—though all the servants lived in mortal terror of the old man—saw him lying on the floor with his head in a pool of blood, screamed, and fainted.

There was a great hullabaloo, of course, and by the time somebody had wakened Mrs. Lampert and she'd got there, half the staff was at that door, nobody daring to go inside. She did, and knelt down and felt his heart and discovered it was still beating faintly. Somebody'd had the brains to phone their doctor, and he arrived in a few minutes.

Lampert was still alive. He was even conscious, or semi-conscious. For Dr. Harris said that when he asked, "Who did this to you?" the dying man whispered, "It was Gordon." Nobody else heard him, and right after that Lampert died.

The corner of the steel desk was soaked in blood. There wasn't a sign of a fingerprint that couldn't be accounted for. And Gordon Lampert was just as absent from the place as he had been for 15 years. When we got there and I told Mrs. Lampert about the doctor's statement she said her husband must have been out of his mind, that she hadn't seen or heard from their son since his father threw him out. I put it to her that perhaps Gordon had come back secretly, seen his father but not her, quarreled with him again, and killed him, but she said it was totally impossible.

"If Gordie had ever thought of coming home," she said, "and how I've wished and praved he would.

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he'd have got in touch with me first. Besides, I was with Issachar in the study till after midnight, discussing business. I've taken an active part in his affairs—it's all we had in common," she commented bitterly. "After all, I was head bookkeeper in his first company when we were married, and I'm a substantial stockholder in most of his holdings.

"When I went to bed he said he was going to finish some figures he was working on, and that's the last I saw or heard of him. We haven't shared a bedroom for a long time. And that's all I knew till they woke me around seven in the morning."

"Well," I said, "*somebody* killed him."

"He had plenty of enemies," she retorted.

"How could anybody get in? You've told me the house is carefully locked up every night, with burglar alarms at every window and door."

"We've got a big staff of servants," she said.

But though we grilled every one of them to a fare-thee-well, I never figured it was any of them. They all slept in, and they all alibied one another, anyway.

If it wasn't Gordon, somehow, then it must have been Fern Lampert herself, as far as I could see. We kept her under surveillance, but there wasn't anything else we could do till we could accumulate some direct evidence against her. Multimillionaires don't get held on suspicion any more than they go to the electric chair.

I was already a Detective Lieutenant then, and I was put in charge of the case. Issacher Lampert was a really big gun locally, and the Commissioner said they needed somebody in command who could be depended on to—well, that's of no importance. I was given a free hand and every sort of backing, but for almost two weeks we got absolutely nowhere.

Then out of the blue Fern Lampert herself called me up and informed me her son had come home. He was there with her now. He had read of his father's death in a New York paper and had come right back. Well, that was possible, granting he hadn't done it himself, because we had kept everything out of the local papers and off the press wires except for the announcement that Lampert had been found dead—which of course he really hadn't been.

I wasn't taking any chances. I was out of my office and on my way two seconds after I'd hung up the phone. I took Detective Sergeant Brian Henderson with me—he's in the department still, and will remember it. I could only hope I'd get to Gordon Lampert before his mother had had time to coach him. If he'd had the nerve to turn up again after murdering his old man, I was sure he'd cook up some kind of alibi with her and claim this was

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his first appearance in the house in 15 years.

If that was his game, then I was going to tell him outright that it was either him or his mother, and see how that hit him. Maybe he'd let her sacrifice herself to save him—and she'd do it all right, I was sure of that—or maybe he wouldn't. But that was going to be my first line. Either she was certain he was innocent and could prove it, or they had concocted some story to get him off the hook—or she'd never have told us he was there.

That place sure was a mansion—you could have put my whole house in the room the maid showed us into, and I remember wishing my wife could see it—carpet up to your ankles, all kinds of paintings and statues and silk brocade and what-not, and big silver and crystal vases of roses that yelled "hothouse" at you. And when the two of them appeared, she was a knockout too. She must have been pushing 60, but she didn't look an hour over a young 40. As for Gordon, I had pictures of him at 20, but a man of 35 is something else again, and I wondered how even his mother could have recognized him at first sight. All I could say when I saw him was that he and the pictures of him were at best look-alikes.

And you know what? She stared me in the eye and said, "Officer, this is my son. I want you to arrest him for his father's murder."

That was the one thing I'd never dreamed of expecting from her! I just stood there with my mouth open, and before I could close it all hell broke loose. First, the guy made a jump for the door, but Henderson tripped him and then got a good hold on him. Then he stopped struggling and yelled, "You can't do this to me! I'm *not* her son! Nobody told me the man was murdered!"

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. Lampert, tears running down her face, "that my poor boy is out of his wits. He has to be put in custody for his own good.

"Don't be frightened, Gordie," she said to him. "Everything will be all right. I'll get you the best lawyer in the city—I'll get you Matthew Van Druhen himself—and he'll prove you weren't responsible and see to it you're sent to the very best private hospital to get the treatment you need."

Well, I couldn't make hide nor hair of it, but all at once the guy turned white and sort of collapsed, and there wasn't another whimper out of him. I decided the only thing we *could* do was take him down and book him on suspicion, and at least keep hold of him till we could get things straightened out. I'd been so set for the defensive mother-tiger bit that I just didn't know what to make of this woman handing over her own son that way.

But before we left she had some more to say.

"He came here this morning—just rang the bell and asked for me. I

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hardly knew him at first, but he proved to me he *was* Gordon, after all these years. And I said to him right away, 'But my God, Gordie, don't you know they're after you for killing your father? You must go away at once—I'll give you money and help you hide till everything quiets down.'

"And then I realized my poor boy must be mentally ill. All of a sudden he began saying that he *wasn't* Gordon—when he'd just proved to me he was—and he launched into some crazy story I couldn't make any sense out of.

"I was terribly frightened—not for myself, but for him. I knew he must have help at once. I didn't know what to do—maybe I was wrong, but all I could think of was to call you."

At that the guy pulled himself together and said, "Officer, this woman is lying. I am not her son, I am not insane, and I never killed anyone. She told me her husband died suddenly, not one word more. And she never told me she had sent for the police."

"Oh, Gordie, how can you?" Fern Lampert sobbed. "You know perfectly well—and I even told you how Dr. Harris insisted that Issachar had accused you—and how about all your childhood memories—and the birthmark—and—"

"Officer, *please* get me out of here," he begged. "I can explain everything. But get me away from her!"

That part I agreed with, so we took him away.

Well, how's that for a start, young fellow? Want me to go on? Okay.

He was only too willing to be booked, even for suspicion of murder. He was bursting with stuff he had to tell us, even though it involved confessing to trying to obtain money under false pretenses, which is a felony. He gave us a long, detailed story, and he repeated it—not word for word, but in substance—to Van Druhen when he arrived, retained by Mrs. Lampert as she had promised. He gave every appearance of believing every word he said. And not one of us bought it as we listened. I know I didn't, and I found out soon that everyone who heard it, including the lawyer, was absolutely certain we were listening either to the ravings of an unbalanced mind or to a tremendous tissue of lies.

Here, wait till I find it in my scrapbook. I copied it from his signed statement that he made later, and if you want you can copy it from me. Here it is, shaped into police journalese:

I am not Gordon Lampert. I am an impostor, who pretended to be him in order to inherit or otherwise get hold of the Lampert fortune. I confess this freely, though I know I can be sent to prison for it.

My name is Reid Buxton. I am 35 years old. I am an actor by profession, at present unemployed. I was

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born in Ohio and have lived in New York City for 12 years.

Last summer the stock company in Massachusetts in which I had a job folded and I came back to New York broke. At that season I couldn't get anything, except two or three small TV commercial parts, and I was spending most of my time going from agency to agency looking for work. I was behind on the rent of my apartment and very low in cash.

This went on until November, and I became desperate. On November 23 I was in a bar on 43rd Street frequented mostly by people in show business; I was hoping to catch on to something that would get me an opening. I could only afford one beer and as I didn't see anyone I knew I was about to leave when a stranger accosted me.

He was about my age and in fact looked very much like me—same height and build, same color of eyes and hair, and features pretty much like mine.

He said to me, "Hey, you're a dead ringer for a friend of mine who's dead. It startled me when I saw you." I answered that I guessed I must have a common sort of face, for people were always calling me by some other name; then I said, "For that matter, you and I look a lot alike, too." He said yes, he realized that; then he said that he had first met this friend in a rooming house they'd lived in and was astonished to see they might be twin brothers for looks, but that I looked even more like his friend than he did.

To be polite I said, "You say he's dead?" and he said, "Yes, poor devil, he died of tuberculosis. We got to be real buddies and he had nobody but me and I saw him through to the end and was with him when he died." "Where was that?" I asked, and he answered, "Oh, in a sanitarium upstate."

Then he said, "Look, would you like to make $10,000?" I laughed and said, "Would I?" and he said, "Well, are you an actor like most of the people I see in this place?" I told him yes, I was a character man but resting at present, and though I've kept up my wardrobe as well as I could, I guess he knew the score. Anyway, he said, "I could put you in the way of $10,000 and maybe more, if you're a good enough actor and if you wouldn't be scared off by maybe skirting the edges of strict legality."

I told him I'd never been in trouble with the law and didn't aim to be now, but he said there was no danger about this, and if it fell through he'd admit he'd hired me and take the blame on himself.

I guess he'd been casing me before this; it was a bar I often dropped into and he must have asked around about me and found out all there was to know, including the fact that I have no near relatives. He said, "If you're interested, let's take a booth back here and I'll

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buy you a refill and tell you all about it."

I didn't like the smell of it, but I was curious. When we got our drinks he fished a newspaper clipping out of his pocket and said, "Read this."

It was dated from Houston—the clipping was from a New York paper—and it said that Issachar Lampert, one of the richest men in Texas from oil and cattle, had been found dead in his luxurious home in a Houston suburb on November 19th. And it said he was 65 years old and was survived by a wife, Fern Bassington Lampert, and a son whose present whereabouts were unknown.

I swear to God it didn't say or even imply that he had been murdered. I never heard that till the police were at the house this morning. It is not true that Mrs. Lampert told me, as she said she did. It never entered my head; I took it for granted he'd died of a stroke or a heart attack.

To go on, this guy asked my name and I told him and asked him his, and he said it was Adam Smith Jones. He laughed and said, "I guess you think it's a phony; everybody does, but that's what my parents named me." So then he put the proposition to me.

He said in the last weeks before this Gordon Lampert died he'd talked a lot about himself and his life and his family—all kinds of stuff that you'd ordinarily never mention; but he was dying and knew it and he kept dwelling on the past. And this Jones said he'd had no real reason to remember it all, but somehow he did.

According to him, this Lampert had had a fight with his father when he was a young fellow, and had been ordered out of the house by the old man, whom his son called pure hell on wheels, with a nasty temper and a domineering character. Gordon had never had any communication since with his family; he was mad at his mother, too, for not having protected him. He'd had a tough time at first, but he'd got by. But when the old man died, he was due to inherit a huge fortune, either right away or through his mother, who would always see to it he had plenty. When that time came, he planned to show up and to claim what was his.

Instead, Jones said, the poor guy died of tb six months ago. And that was the end of it as far as Jones was concerned, till he ran across that newspaper story. All at once he got this wonderful idea. If he could find somebody who looked enough like Lampert to pass as him after 15 years' absence, preferably an actor used to playing other people, and whom he could coach in all the stuff Lampert had told him, the odds were the impersonation could be put over with Mrs. Lampert, who'd be a pushover to have her darling boy back again—and then Jones and whoever he found to do it would be in clover.

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Naturally I asked him why he didn't try it himself, if he and I and Gordon Lampert all resembled each another so closely. He'd certainly considered it, he said, but he decided he couldn't get away with it. For one thing, he couldn't imitate Lamperts' tone of voice and the Texas drawl he'd never lost, whereas an actor could manage it. That's why he'd been hanging around this bar that actors frequented so much, and he'd finally spotted me and asked questions about me, and now did I want to take the chance or not? He'd guarantee me $10,000 as soon as I got any part of the estate—the rest of my share, of course, to go to him—and as much more after Mrs. Lampert died and I inherited the rest of it. I wouldn't have to stay down there—just put it over long enough to be accepted.

It all sounded crazy, as well as criminal, and I turned him down flat. But he kept on making it seem plausible, and I kept on thinking about the situation I was in and how rotten my prospects were. It was an awful temptation, and after an hour or more of talk I agreed at least to think it over. I arranged to meet him again the next day, and by then I'd decided, if he could convince me there was a real chance to get away with it, that I'd try it.

Well, in the end we stayed together night and day for a week, and if there was anything about Gordon Lampert's appearance and personality and early history and surroundings he hadn't told Jones and Jones didn't tell me, I don't know what it was. Everything from the name of his nurse when he was three years old to the marks he got in the fancy private school they sent him to. Jones had some letters from Lampert and I practiced till you couldn't tell my handwriting from his at first glance. And he trained me till he said I sounded just like Lampert to him when I talked and that I had that Texas drawl, with the expected New York modulations, absolutely down pat.

So by yesterday I was all set to fly to Houston and try my luck. Jones paid the fare and expenses. Of course he wasn't going to lose track of me; I was to keep in touch with him, he said, by writing to him General Delivery in care of the main post office. He was going to move from where he was living and might even leave town, in which case he'd write to me—as to Gordon Lampert, of course—and tell me where he'd gone. One place he'd never go to was Texas, but if I had any idea, he said, of double-crossing him, I could forget it; he'd never lose my trail. I had no such idea; in fact, I was depending on him to get me out of trouble if I got into any—and I'd give anything if I could get hold of him right now.

Well, that's about it. I walked in bold as brass this morning and asked for Mrs. Lampert, and when she appeared I just said, "Hello, Mumsie"—which Jones said was what Gor-

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don used to call his mother. She stared at me and almost fainted, and then she just said, "Gordie! Oh, you've come home! Did you know your father was dead?" And not one word about his being murdered, whatever she told the police afterwards.

She kissed me and hugged me and then she began fussing around, giving orders to the servants about me—there wasn't one of them that corresponded to the ones Jones had described, so I guess they were all new since Gordon's time—and she said she'd kept my old room—rooms, it was a suite—just the way I'd left them, and I should go up and see. And as I left to follow the maid upstairs, I saw her sit down by the phone. I supposed she was just going to tell all her friends that her son had come back.

You could have knocked me down with a feather when Lieutenant Schonfeldt and his partner arrived and she told them I had murdered her husband, and that I was crazy.

I make this statement of my own free will and without compulsion.

Reid Buxton

Well, you can imagine how that struck us. "Most fantastic alibi I ever heard"—"This guy isn't loony, he's just a frustrated novelist"—that kind of thing. Even Van Druhen, when he arrived and heard it, couldn't keep the incredulity out of his voice, though all he said was: "Let's get Mrs. Lampert down here and question her on why she's so sure this is her son. Then we can get on with finding out why, son or not, she says he killed her husband."

She was very shook up, as you may imagine, and inclined to be insulted at even being doubted. But finally she said, "All right, gentlemen; I'll give you incontrovertible proof that this is my son. Gordon had a birthmark on his left thigh, in the rough shape of a heart. Take him somewhere and undress him and find out."

So we did, and sure enough, there it was.

But our prisoner had an answer for that too. "It was one of the first things Jones told me," he said, "and he took me down and had me tattooed. This is a tattoo, not a birthmark."

Sergeant Henderson, who did the search, told me he laughed his head off over that one. He has a tattoo himself, and he was sure anybody could tell the difference. He found out later that they can't, not always.

When that didn't go over, the prisoner just about folded up. He muttered something about wishing to heaven he'd been fingerprinted in the past and that would settle the thing once and for all. But that wouldn't have settled it, since Gordon Lampert had never been fingerprinted either.

We didn't feel we had enough to hold him for indictment by the Grand Jury on the murder charge,

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but he'd confessed to impersonation with a view to extortion, so for the time being that would do. I'm simplifying the police process for you, my boy; what you're interested in is old Josiah Schonfeldt's reminiscences, not a technical account of police procedure. The judge set a sizable bail—$10,000, as I recall—but of course Mrs. Lampert came across with that right away. She'd accused the man she believed to be her son of murdering his father, but on the premise that he was insane; so the next thing, she had him shipped into a posh private mental hospital and hired the most expensive psychiatrists she could find to prove her point. Naturally we had our own psychiatrists on the job too.

Here—let me find it in the scrapbook. Our men—and they were good, though they didn't get the fees hers did—agreed that the man booked as Gordon Lampert was "well oriented, completely reasonable, and entirely sane." They left it a moot question whether he really was Lampert or one Reid Buxton and an impostor, but they were sure he wasn't a lunatic. As might be expected, Mrs. Lampert's experts came to exactly the opposite conclusion; he *was* Gordon Lampert, and he *was* definitely psychotic.

Am I boring you? You don't need to be polite. When you've reached my age, young fellow, you'll find you grow more long-winded with every year. So I'll cut this short.

Whether we believed him or not, we did all the obvious things, of course. Letters addressed to Adam Smith Jones at General Delivery in New York came back uncalled for. There were no records of Lampert's death in any tb sanitarium in New York State.

The New York police were cooperating all the way, but the Captain decided to send me to New York to see what I could do at first-hand. Every tattoo artist in the city was interviewed, and every one of them said he had never needled a heart on the left thigh of anyone. The bartenders at the cocktail lounge said they couldn't keep track of the names of all of their customers, but neither of them recalled any two men who looked so much alike or remembered any particular conversation in a back booth.

There *was* a Reid Buxton. He was on file with practically every theatrical agency and they all had photographs. But they were taken in makeup in various parts he'd played and they were of no use for identification. I was doing this end myself, and at the fifth place I got a shock. "Sure we know him," said the agent. "He was in here yesterday."

I'd put off visiting the apartment that our man had given as his address until I'd checked with the agencies. Now I got there quick. It was an old reconstructed brownstone in the Chelsea district—one of those places where most of the cards in the slots read "Occupied." I rang the manager's bell and it turned out

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to be a manageress. When I asked for Buxton she got defensive.

"If you're a bill collector," she said, "leave the poor man alone. He owes me four months rent right now, but I'm not pressing him. He'll pay up when he gets a part. He's been here three years, and he's had his ups and downs, like any actor who isn't tops, but he always makes good in the end." Evidently she was one of those stage-struck landladies that hard-up actors on the fringe dream about but seldom encounter.

I assured her I wasn't after Buxton's non-existent money, and implied without saying so that I was in the profession and had a prospect for him. Anybody in their right mind would have spotted me for a dick, but not this dame. She said he usually got home around seven, and she gave me his apartment number. So at seven I rang his bell and the door buzzed. I had a New York cop with me to make it legal in case I had to make an arrest.

It was a walkup and we climbed to the fourth floor. He opened the door when I knocked and looked surprised; I guessed he'd been expecting a girl.

"You Reid Buxton?" I asked.

"Yes. What's it about?"

One glance showed me that nobody could have taken him for anything like Gordon Lampert's double. His hair and his eyes were dark, as against Lampert's light brown hair and blue eyes. He was about the same height, but a lot thinner.

"Mind if we come in?" I flashed my badge. He looked puzzled when he found out I was from the Houston police.

He let us in grudgingly and said, "What do you want to see *me* for?" He didn't seem alarmed, the way even innocent people usually do with the police, only wary. I took particular note of his voice—an actor's voice, I thought, well modulated, but on the bass side; our man's was much higher.

I told him as much as I wanted him to know, if he really was Reid Buxton—that we were holding a man claiming to be him, arrested on a felony charge. Then he really did look both scared and mad.

"The guy's nuts!" he said.

"Maybe," I agreed. "That's one thing being considered. Did you ever know a man named Gordon Lampert?"

He shook his head, then did a double take. "Lampert?" he said. "Isn't that the name of the rich man who got murdered down in Texas?"

By this time we had given more to the press—not Issachar Lampert's dying words, or our arrest, but the fact that murder was suspected and the usual malarkey about the police expecting to make an arrest any minute; and since "the missing son of the deceased" was supposed to be in New York, the papers there had given it a paragraph or two more, so it was logical that Buxton could have seen it.

"His son," I answered him.

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"Never met him."

"What about a man named Adam Smith Jones?"

He laughed. "Never," he said. "I wouldn't forget a name like that."

I showed him two photographs—one of Gordon Lampert at 20 that I'd got from his mother, and another we took. It was hard to tell if they were of two different people. He didn't recognize either.

I still had the payoff question to ask. "Where were you and what were you doing on November 19th?"

He got really jittery then.

"I was right here in New York City," he said, "but what I was doing I couldn't tell you—how can I remember a day like any other? You mean this nut is claiming he's me, and that I knocked off his old man? I've never been in Houston in my life."

"It's more complicated than that," I said. I decided to give him a little more rope. "This man claimed to be Gordon Lampert, back home after fifteen years of exile. The mother accepted him. Then she turned right around and called the police, and told them this was her son all right, but that he had come back before that, on the 19th, quarreled with his father and killed him, and now she wanted him locked up for his own good. Her line is that he's crazy and will be acquitted because of insanity and sent to a mental hospital. When the guy heard that, he backed down, admitted he was an impostor, that he'd known old Lampert was dead but not that he had been murdered—and that his real name was Reid Buxton, and he gave your address. So we booked him on a fraud and extortion charge, and he's out now on $10,000 bail."

Buxton just stared at me with his mouth open.

"I never heard anything so fantastic in all my born days," he finally managed to say. "Why did he pick on *me?* I'm nobody important—just a minor character actor out of work. And I'm absolutely certain I don't know the man at all. Ask the manager, downstairs; she doesn't see me often but she knows the apartment hasn't been vacant for even a day."

Just then there was a noise behind us. The door was still open and in walked the girl he must have had a date with. She was a real dish—probably in the profession too—dressed in a cute print and a little fur jacket, with a rose corsage pinned to the lapel. She stood stock-still, surprised by the scene confronting her. Buxton waved her out, but she wasn't having any.

"Why, Reid, what's wrong?" she cried, going up and putting her arms around him.

"Later, Marilyn—go home and I'll call you," he muttered, his face red. "Something's come up."

And then he started to sneeze.

He couldn't stop. He kept on sneezing and tears ran down his face. The girl looked contrite.

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"Oh, honey, I forgot!" she said. "Here—I'll throw it out." And she undid the corsage and threw it into the hall.

"Get out, Marilyn," he growled between sneezes.

"Oh, very well," she said, tossing her head, and left.

Son, never let anyone tell you not to follow hunches. What we call a hunch is a sudden clarification of subconscious ideas we may have had all along. I got one then, and I obeyed it instantly.

"Well, Mr. Buxton," I said, "this sure is a mix-up. Sorry to have spoiled your date. We'll be talking to you again when we've got it all straightened out."

"Any time," he said, still sneezing. "Always glad to help the police. And don't worry about the girl; I only met her last week."

I hustled the New York cop out with me, and the minute we got back to headquarters I had them put a tail on Reid Buxton. Then I phoned Henderson in Houston and told him to find out—not from Mrs. Lampert, but from Dr. Harris, the same doctor they'd had for years and the one who was called in after the murder—if Gordon Lampert had ever had an allergy to roses.

You see, I was remembering that the big room in the Lampert house had been full of vases of hothouse roses. And nary a sneeze had ever come out of our suspect.

Henderson called back in an hour, and said yes.

That was the beginning of the end. We picked up the so-called Buxton on a charge of impersonation, and there on his left thigh was the birthmark—a lot more natural-looking than the one tattooed on the real Buxton. The phony Buxton broke down pretty fast after that, and led us to the tattoo artist he'd paid to keep his mouth shut. We got him extradited to Texas, and he was indicted for murder. They found him guilty and sane, and he got life; he's still in Huntsville.

He was, of course, Gordon Lampert, alias Adam Smith Jones. Every word the real Reid Buxton had told us was true.,

The phony Buxton's dark hair was a wig, the dark eyes were tinted contact lenses, and he'd been dieting like mad to lose weight. He'd deliberately lowered the tone of his voice. The landlady had phoned up to him I was coming, and he was ready for me. Apparently he hadn't had a chance to warn off Marilyn.

What's more, when that canary sang, he sang plenty. He said the whole scheme was really his mother's. She had known from the beginning where he was—they'd always been in communication, and she'd kept him well heeled; he'd never had to work. She kept after old Issachar till she thought she had him softened, and then she'd told Gordon to come home. She was there when he came on November 19th; she was there when he quarreled again with his father, knocked him

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down, and pounded his head on the corner of the steel desk in the study till his skull was crushed.

She hid him somewhere in that mansion while they worked things out. She persuaded him to go back to New York and try to find a man who could pretend to be him; she'd made out as if she believed it and then turn the impostor in for the murder. It would be a perfect frame-up. She'd go through all the motions—Van Druhen for the defense, the plea of insanity, and the high-priced psychiatrists, and she would go on the stand if necessary and perjure herself about his mental history.

She was certain—and she was probably right—that if the fall guy escaped the chair or a life sentence he would be confined in a maximum-security mental hospital and never be released.

Then she and her son would go away together somewheres out of the country—don't ask me about passports, but there are plenty of ways to wangle it when you've got millions—and live abroad under another name. She'd sell all her property and transfer her money and stocks to an anonymous account in a Swiss bank—you know, an account identified only by a number. And they'd live happily ever after.

She might very well have got away with it, if only Gordon had remembered to warn Buxton to sneeze whenever he got near any roses.

Millions of dollars or not, we'd have had her indicted for conspiracy and as accessory, if she hadn't taken an overdose of sleeping pills.

Buxton—the real Buxton—got five years. He served it, with time off for good behavior, and disappeared. He changed his name, and as I said, he keeps in touch with me, but I'm not giving him away. You've probably seen him on TV—he plays mostly old men's parts now.

Well, that's it, my boy—my most exciting case. Long ago and forgotten by now. But here—look in the scrapbook. Oh, I showed you that clipping, didn't I? They gave me a citation, and that's when I told them, "I only did my duty." I never was one to boast.

Hey, tell that dog of yours to go back in the garden. I get hives if I let any dog get near me. That's how I came to know so much about allergies.

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**second *NEW* story by a member of MWA (Mystery Writers of America)**

*When EQMM published Joan Richter's first two stories in 1962, the Richter family lived in Valhalla, New York. But the Richters have traveled since then. Mr. Richter became Deputy Director of the Peace Corps project in Kenya, and Mrs. Richter writes that each day in and around Nairobi unfolds some new surprise for her; much of the East African countryside, she says, is like New England and Northern California combined, with the added attractions of thatched huts and roaming wild game. And Mrs. Richter's letterhead bears out the latter: the pale blue sheet of paper has a left-hand border in brown and black showing two giraffes, an elephant, a rhinoceros, a water buffalo, a lion, and other fauna of the Richters' new home.*

*But we are happy to report that Joan Richter has not limited her writing to letters. Here is her first story about East Africa, and it has a perceptive quality—the freshness of perceptive eyes seeing new sights, wondrous and exotic sights, for the first time . . .*

# INTRUDER IN THE MAIZE

*by JOAN RICHTER*

SHE WAITED UNTIL THE CHURNING of the Land Rover's heavy wheels on the long gravel drive had faded into the softer sound of tires against murum and then she got up and quickly began to dress. She was annoyed that she had wasted the last hour in a pretense of sleep, but it had been preferable to a confrontation with Jack.

She had heard him get up while it was still dark and go outside. And she had imagined him as he crouched on the rise overlooking the field of maize, waiting, as he had been waiting and watching every dawn for the last two weeks. Sometimes she wondered if he remembered any longer what it was he was waiting for.

She threw a sweater over her suntanned shoulders and left the house by the veranda door, passing the kitchen as she went to tell Kariuki all she wanted this morning was coffee and she would fix that herself later. She walked across the dew-soaked lawn, past the bottle brush



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tree from whose rose-colored flowers the sunlight birds drank their morning fill, to where the shrubs thinned and she could look out across the green valley to the opposite ridge.

Overhead the East African sky was an intense blue, spreading endlessly, with high clouds that rose like white mountains asking to be climbed. Sometimes she wondered if Jack saw any of this, if he realized at all how much beauty there was just outside their window.

She breathed deeply of the cool air. It was dry, but it did not strike her as thin, not even on that first day, a year ago, when they had just arrived. The only time she felt the altitude was when she walked uphill, and then her breath came in quick, short pulls and her chest felt hard and tight.

A cracking of a twig caused her to look down the near slope into the valley where, among the trees and brush, the smoke of cook fires rose. She saw a man making his way up along one of the paths, his dark head bent, so that she could not see his face; but from his dress—the short-sleeved white shirt and the dark trousers—she was sure it was Molo, one of the few farmers in the area who had adopted European dress.

He had a small *shamba* on the other side of the valley where in previous years he had raised potatoes and maize, but this season he had set out his first real money crop—a half acre of pyrethrum, a silver green plant from whose daisy-like flowers an insecticide was extracted. She wondered what the occasion was for his leaving his *shamba* so early in the day.

"*Habari,*" she said, using the Swahili greeting.

"*Mzuri,*" he replied, but the look on his face did not seem to agree that everything was good.

There were a few more prescribed words for them to exchange before they exhausted her knowledge of Swahili. Then they would switch to English and slowly Molo would come to the point of his visit.

He looked up at the sky. "The rains come soon."

She looked too, but saw nothing that resembled a rain cloud. But, then, both night and day the skies were strange to her. The stars were not the ones she knew, nor were the clouds. She knew only that they were beautiful, more so than any she had ever seen anywhere.

"Is the Bwana at home?"

He called her Memsab Simon, but he never called Jack anything but Bwana.

"He left early this morning on safari." She smiled, still not used to the East African meaning of the word; only rarely did it mean sun helmets and bearers and trekking through the bush; most often it referred to any trip out of town, whether for a day or a week.

"Did the Bwana Red go with him?"

Lately Jack almost never went

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anywhere without Red, and she did not know whether that made her angry or relieved, whether it was an indication of Jack's lack of trust in her, or lack of confidence in himself. She liked Red—perhaps too much—but she had done nothing to cause Jack to be jealous. Whether Red returned her admiration she had no idea, for he showed no sign; but her ego was mollified by the knowledge that Red was no fool. He had to work with Jack (another sticky point—Jack was the boss, but Red, having lived in East Africa for the last ten years, knew all there was to know).

"Yes, Bwana Red went with him. Is something wrong, Molo? Do you need more seed?"

Jack had come to East Africa on a two-year contract as an agricultural adviser, and one of the things for which he was responsible was the parceling out of seed. It was given on a loan basis, to be paid for when the crop was harvested. It was a precious commodity, doled out on the basis of past records of repayment. Jack had been concerned about stealing, so he kept the sacks of seed locked in a storehouse at one end of the maize field.

That was the one thing she didn't like, the one thing that marred the beauty of the land and the sky; barred windows, locked doors—not just outside doors, but all inside doors, to closets and pantries, doors that sealed one section of a house off from another.

"It's different with the seed," she had said to Jack, though she had not really meant it—but the seed was not her affair. "But I'll be darned if I'm going to lock up the pantry every time I leave the house, just so the houseboy won't help himself to a spoonful of sugar!"

She had pointed to a peg board on the wall. "Look at that! There must be fifty different keys there. I won't live that way."

"The house is yours to run as you want," Jack had said. "But don't come crying to me the day one of them"—and he had nodded in the direction where Kariuki and his helper were preparing lunch—"walks off with something that can't be replaced."

After that she had put the silver that Jack's family had given them in the wall safe behind the mirror in the bedroom and left it there. It was too much bother taking it out in the morning and locking it up again at night.

One day when Red was with them, Jack brought up the topic again, thinking he would have his colleague's support; but Red had said, "If I bothered to check, I suppose at the end of each month I'd find I was out a pound of sugar and maybe some tea. On a day to day basis Jinja helps himself to a banana or toast that's left over from breakfast. The banana would rot before I'd get around to eating it—and what would I do with leftover toast but throw it away?"

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"That isn't the point," Jack had countered. "They ought to be taught that what's yours is not theirs."

"There's a difference between stealing money and things of value —and taking scraps of food." Red's voice had been patient, but not condescending. "When Jinja washes my trousers, he checks the pockets because I'm ways leaving things in them—cigarettes, screws, keys, a few shillings. He keeps a basket on the shelf above the tub for all that stuff. I find the shillings there too, along with everything else."

Jack had looked at him narrowly. "Have you ever checked? Have you ever left an odd bunch of change—"

"You mean have I ever tried to trap him?"

Jack nodded.

Red shook his head. "If I did that it would mean I didn't trust him. And he would know, and then the whole thing would break down and I *couldn't* trust him."

Jack had continued the discussion, long after Red would have been happy to let it go. In a final effort to win a point Jack had flashed, "The Africans wanted freedom, now they have to accept the responsibility that goes with it!"

"I couldn't agree with you more," Red had said, "But I don't go along with your methods. You want to *police* them—and that isn't freedom. Sure there are thieves among them —but show me a society that hasn't any. Just once suspect them of thievery without cause, and you will create a thief."

After Red had left them, she had not been able to keep silent. Perhaps she had been too strong in stating her position, for Jack had said unpleasantly, "So you think the Bwana Red is a great hero too." And Jack had turned away . . .

Now Molo shook his head. No, he had not come for seed.

What does he want, she wondered. What has brought him up from the valley at a time of day when he should be working his *shamba?* Although she was better at it than when they had first come, she still found it difficult to read the African face. Joy she could identify, but other emotions—anger, fear, distrust—eluded her.

She prepared herself for more small talk. "The tomato plants you gave me are doing very well, Molo. Would you like to see them?"

A sudden though almost imperceptible change in his expression made her realize that accidentally she had hit on what he had been waiting for. He had been waiting for her to invite him onto her land.

"I would like to see maize. Bwana says wild pig is coming and eating."

So even Molo had heard of Jack's morning excursions. "You can have my gun," Red had offered. "I bet, whatever it is, comes around dawn. From that rise over there it would be an easy shot."

"I'll get him," Jack had said, "but I won't use a gun."

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"Suit yourself, but setting traps can be slow. That's a big field."

"Traps?" She remembered the arrogance in Jack's voice. "I intend to use a bow."

Red had looked up quickly and perhaps the look that crossed his face *had* been one of admiration, though she had not seen it as such. But Jack's satisfied face had been evidence enough of his own interpretation.

"I'm a fair marksman," he had said. "I had some practice in the States."

Silently she recalled the country club's manicured lawn, the steady bull's-eye target.

"A couple of weeks ago I bought a bow from one of Molo's brothers and a dozen arrows. It's a different kind of weapon from what I've been used to, but it sure has zing."

"A little light to do in a pig," Red said, "unless you're an incredibly good shot."

Jack had given him a smug look. "I've got something else that will help it along."

She remembered the frown that had creased Red's brow. "I'd be careful with that stuff. It's not something to fool with."

"Thanks for the advice. I never did have a wet nurse, and I hardly need one now."

Just the recollection of his retort made her blush . . .

Molo led the way along the ridge toward the maize. She knew that the polite palaver was over. They were getting to the reason for his visit. He turned when they reached the edge of the green field and continued along the north side of the planted area, moving in the direction of the rise, the lookout Jack went to every morning, where she knew he had gone this morning before he'd left to meet Red.

At the rise Molo stopped, and for the first time she noticed that he had his *panga* with him, the machete-like knife whose broad blade was used to cut grass, chop roots, dig potatoes, prune trees, and sever the heads off chickens. It was as much a part of the African farm scene as was the hoe in the States before mechanization. Usually when Molo came to pay a social call or to see Jack or Red on business, he left his *panga* behind. Idly, she wondered why he had it with him now.

He was pointing with it and she followed the dark line of his arm to the end of the blade.

"Pig come out of forest and walk low on belly through maize."

For a moment she could not see the slight furrow in the sea of green stalks, but then her eyes discovered the thin line that traveled straight across the otherwise untouched field.

"You stay here, Memsab Simon."

There was something in the tone of his voice that she reacted to. He was not being rude, but rather protective, and she wondered against what. Or was she misunderstanding

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completely? Was this like an expression she could not read?

"Molo, you don't think the pig is there now?"

"No, pig is gone."

"Then why, what—"

"It is better you stay. Let me see."

She nodded. Molo might be a guest on her land, but she was still a stranger in his country. With an uneasiness—of what she was not sure—she stood watching him as he descended the small hill and entered the maize. Overhead the sky was the same blue it had been minutes ago, before she had seen him coming up from the valley, with the same white, climbing clouds. There was still no visible sign of rain. It was something else that had thrown a shadow over the day.

The maize was shoulder high, so that when Molo paused and looked at the ground she could not see what it was he was looking at.

What had he found? What *was* he looking for?

He straightened and walked forward, stopping again after a few paces. Then he walked quickly on as though he had seen ahead of him what he had been looking for.

He had entered the field from the side bounded by the forest and was following the path that had been broken for him. As she studied the larger picture she saw that the parting in the maize seemed to lead to the storehouse.

Oh, God, she thought. Some animal found a way into Jack's burglarproof store! Had Jack come here every morning for the last two weeks and not discovered this for himself?

Molo had almost reached the wooden building. As she watched his movements a thought began to form in her mind. Had an animal made that path? Or had it been a man? A man trying to find a way to break into the seed store?

Molo had said something earlier that now made her wonder. "Pig come out of forest and walk low on belly through maize." It was an odd way to describe an animal's foraging.

Molo had reached the storehouse and was standing with his eyes cast down. Then he raised his head and called in Swahili. "Come now."

Hurriedly she started down the slope, slipping as she went, but driven by an impatience that came of waiting, curiosity, and a mounting concern that something was wrong. Her sweater slipped off her shoulders, but she did not stop to pick it up. At the edge of the maize field she put her arms up in front of her face to shield it from the slashing leaves.

She stumbled and looked down at the ground and saw what Molo had seen—a stone smeared with blood and more blood on one of the low leaves. Ahead there were drops of blood, hardly visible on the red brown earth, but unmistakable and vivid against the pale green of the maize.

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Had Jack hit his target this morning? Had he only wounded it? She looked around her, trying to see into the impenetrable maize. The wounded animal might be hidden, crouching, waiting to spring at her, or to charge. How could Molo be so sure it was gone? Already she had thrust the thought from her that her husband's quarry might have been human.

Her breath was coming in quick shallow gasps when she reached Molo who was standing in the shadow of the storehouse. Her eyes fell to the ground and she saw a pile of dirt and a hole dug under the foundation; beside them a sack of seed and an abandoned *panga* that had been used to dig the hole.

She took all this in, and more, for at Molo's feet lay an arrow, its shaft bloody, its sharp triangular point sticky. Her hands flew to her face and she heard herself moan. An animal could not use a *panga,* nor could it tear an arrow from its stricken body! The succeeding thought made her cringe and her head twisted between her hands. Jack had shot a man!

All arrows looked the same. Perhaps it wasn't Jack's at all. He had marked his, scoring the shaft. But from where she stood she could not see—the shaft was partially covered with the loosened earth.

With a supreme effort she slid her hands down from her face and brought them to her sides. She had to find out. She had to know. She hesitated, and then with horrified determination she took a quick step forward, her hand outstretched. But almost before she moved, Molo's shadow was upon her and his arm caught her across the chest and threw her to the ground.

A scream choked in her throat as she stared up at him, a black man standing over her, his *panga* raised. It sliced through the air and caught the blood-smeared arrow and tossed it aside.

She saw him stab his *panga* in the ground and turn to her. "I am sorry, Memsab, but the arrow is poison."

He held out his hand and helped her to her feet.

"Even a scratch brings death."

A residue of terror filled her throat and she did not trust herself to speak, for she could not let Molo know what she had thought. She looked at him and pointed to where the arrow lay. The question formed slowly on her lips. "Is it the Bwana's arrow?"

"Yes," he said. "It killed my brother."

Her hand reached out and then fell to her side. What was there for her to say?

"I am sorry, too," Molo said and then she knew that her face did not present the enigma to him that his did to her. "I am sorry that my brother became a thief—and that your husband must die."

Oh, God, she thought, what did that mean? Tribal vengeance? Could she reason with Molo? If not,

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she would have to get word to Jack somehow. It was possible that he and Red had not yet left town.

She turned to Molo, hoping she could find some words to reach him, but he had already begun to speak. The words came slowly, thoughtfully, half in English, half in Swahili.

"Before the Bwana came, my brother was watchman for the Bwana Red. He slept at night outside the seed store, the old one which we do not use any more. No one stole or they would know my brother's *panga.*"

Molo's eyes fell to the ground where the multipurpose knife lay. Then he looked at her again. "But then the new Bwana came and everything changed and my brother became a thief." He stopped. It was as much as he could say.

"But why did your brother sell my husband a bow? Why did he give him the poison?"

"The bow he sold because he needed money, and because he thought the Bwana could not shoot well. But he did not give him poison. He would not. The Bwana got poison somewhere far from here, from someone he pay a lot of money."

Suddenly Molo cocked his head, in response to some distant sound. She heard it too. It was the Land Rover returning. She heard it leave the murum road and turn into the gravel drive.

"It is the Bwana Red," Molo said.

She looked, but it was too far for her to recognize who was in the vehicle. It bore down on them coming as close to the field as it could. Then she saw that it was Red driving and that the seat beside him was empty.

She ran toward him. "Where's Jack?"

"In town. What's going on? He sent me out here, said there was something for me to see."

"There was no wild pig in the maize—it was Molo's brother. He'd dug a hole under the storehouse."

Red frowned as he climbed out of the Land Rover. "I guess that's one for Jack's side. I'd have said it would take a lot to make Molo's brother turn thief." A flicker of hope crossed his clouded face. "I suppose Jack caught him in the act?"

She took a breath. "Jack didn't catch him. He killed him."

Red's face went blank with disbelief. "Why? He was a man, not an animal. Why did he kill him?"

Tears seared her eyes, but she fought against them. It was past the time for weeping. She had no answer to Red's question. It was what she had been asking herself.

Molo had come up and was standing with them. Red turned to him. "How did he do it? He wasn't that good a shot with the bow."

"The arrow came here." Molo touched the fleshy part of his thigh. "It would not have killed him—but it was poisoned."

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"Poisoned!" Red turned to her. "Where did he get poison?"

"I thought he'd gotten it from Molo's brother. But Molo says no, that he got it somewhere far from here."

"That arrogant—this can only mean trouble for all of us—whites and blacks."

Molo shook his head. "No, Bwana Red. There will be no trouble. My brother is dead. And the Bwana will die. It will end there."

"Molo, old friend," Red said in Swahili, "the viper eventually spends itself. Do not put yourself in danger by seeking its death."

"Do not worry, Bwana Red. The viper has felt its own sting."

She looked from one man to the other. What had they said? She had caught the proverb, but did not understand its application. She turned to Red. "Why didn't Jack come back with you? Where is he?"

"I left him at the dispensary. He cut himself on one of those damn arrowheads—not bad, but enough to need a couple of stitches. I wanted to wait with him, but he didn't seem to want me around. Now I understand why."

She listened to each word, each progressive syllable, and her realization grew until the horror of it was evident in her face.

Red caught her hand. "God, I'm sorry. I know what you're thinking. But he's all right. It's just a simple cut. You see the poison is applied to the shaft of the arrow, not the tip—for reasons just like this—it's so easy to get a scratch and that's all you need."

She looked at him and shook her head. Then she turned to Molo. "How did you know? How did you know the Bwana would die?"

"Many people were in town, waiting at the dispensary. They brought the news to my *shamba*."

"What's this all about?" Red said, turning to her. "I just told you. He'll be all right."

"No," she said. "No, he won't. You see he didn't know about applying the poison to the shaft—he put it on the arrowheads."

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*Lieutenant Roberts considered Lockston a serious security risk . . .*

# SECURITY RISK

*by BRIAN HAYES*

THE NEW SECURITY OFFICER SAT in the Director's office holding a thin file and trying to suppress his impatience. He was a young man, although not as young as he looked, being twenty-six. He was also ambitious and untroubled by a sense of humor.

To the Director, gazing at him from behind his desk, his youth was frightening. The previous security officer, Captain Grayson, had been middle-aged—an easy-going man with a mind you could get in touch with and an unobtrusive efficiency. His successor, Lieutenant Roberts, paraded efficiency like a banner.

But the Director showed no sign of these feelings as he listened to what Lieutenant Roberts was saying.

"Lockston will have to go, sir. In view of what I've just told you it'll be impossible to continue to give him security clearance. In fact, he should never have been allowed to work on the project in the first place."

The Director leaned back in his chair, puffed comfortably at his pipe, and regarded the security officer through the smoke. He couldn't claim that Lockston was a key man, but he was part of the team and he didn't want to lose him. Besides, Lockston was someone he liked.

He said, "You haven't told me anything to make me think that Lockston might be disloyal."

"He was a member of a subversive organization, sir."

"But that was twenty-five years ago—when he was at the University."

"It indicates his political leanings at that time, and if he has changed his mind since then, why didn't he inform my predecessor who carried out the original screening?"

"Perhaps he forgot."

"Forgot!"

The Director smiled. "It's quite possible, you know. You give five bob to some society. For the Betterment of Cultural Relations, or something like that. You don't know that it's really subversive and if you do you don't care because—well, you're nineteen and it amuses you. Good heavens, I probably joined such things myself."

"I hope you didn't, sir. In any case, the other matter is more important. Lockston has been in prison. You don't suggest that he might have forgotten that?"



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"Of course not. But it was a long time ago, too. Besides, his crime had no bearing on security."

"Everything has a bearing on security, sir. Especially a thing like this. It's a character weakness."

"A character weakness? Lockston?" The Director shook his head. "May I see the file?"

Reluctantly Lieutenant Roberts passed it across the desk and the Director examined it thoughtfully. Here were revealed isolated details of Lockston's life, but the typewritten or printed words had no meaning for the Director. They made no impact on a mind that had already formed its opinion.

"Odd that your predecessor didn't dig this up."

The security officer said nothing: he considered that his predecessor had been incredibly careless. He let the thought ride the silence until the Director looked up at him sharply. Then Roberts said, "You understand, sir, that if an enemy agent were to get hold of a thing like this he might use it as a lever."

"That hadn't escaped me. But I can't see Lockston letting himself be blackmailed."

"The man's unstable, sir. It's not a risk I'm prepared to take."

"The responsibility would be mine, wouldn't it?"

"I think not, sir."

The Director tapped out his pipe. Arguing would do no good; Lieutenant Roberts had made up his mind and this was a matter on which the authorities would support him.

The Director said, "What do you want me to do?"

"He must be dismissed."

"I've no reason."

"You'll have to think of one."

"Very well. Do you mind if I keep this file for a day or two? Men with Lockston's qualifications are not so easy to find. I shall need a little time."

"How much time, sir?"

"I can't say. Two weeks, perhaps."

The security officer stood up. "Don't let it be longer, sir."

When he had gone the Director refilled his pipe. It had been no surprise to him to learn that Lockston was, or had been, a rogue, but this did not affect his liking for the man. And in spite of what Roberts had called a character weakness, he doubted if Lockston could be broken, even by blackmail, into doing something he had no mind for.

He doubted—but he couldn't be sure.

During the days that ensued, Lieutenant Roberts tried hard to keep an eye on Lockston; but he had no reason to follow him everywhere and he certainly didn't follow him on a Saturday afternoon ten days later when Lockston paid a visit to the neighboring town.

Lockston was a tall craggy man in his middle forties. He had few friends, perhaps because he didn't need them. On his occasional visits to town it was his habit to go to

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the cinema, and afterward he usually had a light meal at a nearby coffee house.

It was so on that afternoon. Lockston obtained coffee and a plate of bacon and eggs at the counter and then carried them over to one of the tables.

A few moments later another man entered the café. He too ordered coffee which he carried to the same table at which Lockston sat. Lockston looked up at him in surprise, for the place was not full and many of the other tables were empty.

The stranger said, "You mind if I sit here?"

"It's all right if you want to."

The stranger made a slight inclination of his body, the movement hinting at a formal bow. "You English wish for privacy. I would not have intruded only . . . you're Mr. Lockston, aren't you?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I've seen you before. Or was it your photograph? You work at that hush-hush place—some sort of semi-military establishment out of town?"

Lockston had been trying to read the evening newspaper. He now put it down. "Who are you?"

"My name," the man smiled, "is Masters."

"What do you want, Mr. Masters?"

"To do you a service."

He took a wallet from his pocket and extracted a newspaper clipping which he placed on the table. Lockston stared at it. He did not need to read it because he knew well what was printed there. After a while he looked up. His face expressed nothing, neither fear nor anger, and his eyes were steady.

He said, "What do you want?"

Masters gave a little shrug. "Twelve months," he said. "Do you still feel bitter about it, Mr. Lockston?"

"I never did feel bitter."

"But you should. It was a savage sentence. What harm had you done? The women spoke up for you, didn't they? By the way, what happened to them?"

"It was eighteen years ago."

"As long as that? But these things are not forgotten, are they? Not in a bourgeois society. You were sent to prison, but did the punishment end there? No. And what happened afterwards? To your career? Didn't you find it difficult to get a job? And even now, I doubt if those who employ you are aware of the contents of that clipping."

"Now we're getting somewhere," said Lockston. "Are you proposing to send it to them?"

"Certainly not."

"What is it you want then? Money?"

"Good heavens, my dear chap, no. I'm on *your* side. I sympathize with you. Anyone who has the courage to defy the bourgeois code. I'd like to make it up to you for what you've suffered."

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"You would? How?"

"I shall think of a way."

"If you have a proposition to make, go ahead."

Masters picked up the clipping and replaced it in his pocket.

"A proposition? I must think of something." He stood up. "To our next meeting, Mr. Lockston."

"When will that be?"

"Soon. Don't worry, Mr. Lockston. I'll get in touch with you."

Lockston watched him go, sitting there for a full half minute, motionless. Then, with a movement of his shoulders that seemed to shake off his thoughts, he calmly continued with his meal . . .

The research establishment where Lockston worked, although staffed mostly by civilian scientists, was run under military discipline. On his return Lockston showed his pass at the gate and entered the main building. He walked along the passages until he came to the administrative offices, but these were dark and empty.

He hesitated. He was not sure in his mind what he intended to do. He could either report the incident or wait for Masters to make his next move. Still undecided, Lockston entered the lounge. As usual at that time on a Saturday evening it was almost empty. He noticed that Lieutenant Roberts was at one of the tables writing a letter.

Lockston sat down and picked up a magazine, turning over the pages without looking at them. It had been in his mind to report the incident to the Director, but here was the security officer whose concern it really was. Lockston thought of Masters. The man had been so certain Lockston would not say anything for fear of losing his job.

Lockston threw down the magazine, got up, and stood beside the security officer.

"Good evening."

Without looking up from his writing, Lieutenant Roberts replied, "Good evening."

"Ran into a man in town this afternoon. Someone in your line of business, I think."

"In my line? A security officer?"

"No. A spy."

Lieutenant Roberts had suffered from jokes of this kind before. "Indeed," he said coldly.

"Well, if he wasn't a secret agent of some sort his conversation didn't make sense."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, I'm serious. His name was Masters—or so he said. He never got right down to it, but I think he was softening me up."

"Softening you up?"

"Yes," said Lockston. "For blackmail."

On the following morning Lieutenant Roberts took the whole story to the Director.

"This is exactly what I thought might happen, sir. This man, Masters—that won't be his real

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name, of course—is obviously an enemy agent and he's going about the affair in exactly the way we'd expect. That first meeting was a—well, as Lockston described it, a kind of softening up. You notice the attempt to play up any resentment the victim might feel towards society and at the same time, combined with this, the veiled threat of exposure. But nothing direct—no demands of any kind. The victim is left in a state of anxiety, wondering what's going to happen, feeling afraid. Next time, Lockston will be asked for some specific piece of information. It'll be something quite valueless, a line of experiment that's been abandoned, perhaps, so that it'll be no strain on his conscience to hand the information over. But then after that—"

"After that they'll have him." The Director nodded. "Or they would have. But Lockston came straight to you?"

"Yes, sir. You were right about him. A very curious man, difficult to make out. But not the sort of person you can easily frighten—no not easily at all."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"He volunteered the whole story, sir. Said he hadn't mentioned it before—about his past, I mean—because he didn't think it was any of our business. Besides, he said he wouldn't have got the job if he had. He was quite open and frank about it."

"Good."

"Bigamy, sir! Isn't that a rather curious crime for a scientist like Lockston?"

"Well, some of us are human too. Did he offer any explantation?"

"He said he was unlucky. He said he always happened to fall in love with the type that wanted to get married. Do you think he was joking, sir?"

"I don't know. But he seems to have been very obliging. Now about his replacement," the Director went on. "I'm in touch with a man who might be—"

"His replacement, sir? Lockston's? I thought you understood. I'd like him to remain. In fact, it's very important that he should remain because it's through him we may hope to trap this man Masters. And not only him. He's probably connected with a whole spy ring. We may be able to get the lot, top to bottom. Besides, Lockston has certainly proved his loyalty."

"Yes, I suppose he has."

"Then you'll retain Lockston, sir?"

"I shall be glad to."

"Thank you, sir." The Lieutenant stood up. "You won't mention this matter to anyone, please."

"Not a soul," said the Director.

"Good. I won't do anything, of course, until Masters gets in contact with Lockston again. And then—well, you can leave it all to me."

When he had gone the Director remained for a few moments in thought; then he picked up the tele-

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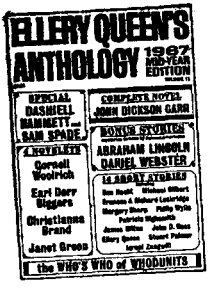
phone and having got through to the outside exchange, gave the operator a number.

"That you, Henry?" he said when he had been connected. "Thanks for helping me out. It worked fine. Don't forget to send back that newspaper clipping so that I can return it to the file. You did very well. Our chap went straight to the security officer and reported you as an enemy agent."

"That's good," said Henry. "I was only with him in the café for a few minutes, but I thought he would."

"So did I," said the Director. "But I had to make sure."

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*Bankhart of the Homicide Squad was hobnobbing with "the four hundred"; he was also making a play for a gorgeous blue-eyed babe hanging on every thrilling word that Bank was improvising about a homicide that had never happened—and then it did happen! Not the murder case Bank was inventing—but a stunner just the same . . .*

*One of the most interesting investigations in Lawrence Treat's new police procedural series—Mr. Treat has the true 'tec touch . . .*

# B AS IN BURGLARY

*by LAWRENCE TREAT*

WHAT WITH THE BLARE OF THE orchestra out on the lawn, nobody even heard the shot, least of all big Jim Bankhart of the Homicide Squad. He was one of two hundred or so guests dining under the caterer's tent on that rainy, summer evening. As far as Bank was concerned, somebody could have fired off a cannon and he wouldn't have noticed it. He had other things on his mind.

He was wearing a formal white jacket, and he had his table partner spellbound. Her clear blue eyes gazed up with adoration at his busted nose and his tomahawk of a face. She was sitting next to a real live detective, and she was thrilled. She kept saying so.

She was definitely his dish. He had a romantic streak in him and he always dreamed of meeting beautiful blondes. Or brunettes or redheads or any other color they happened to dye their hair. The Homicide Squad usually kidded the pants off him, but if they could see him now, all dolled up and with this blue-eyed babe hanging on every word of his, they'd fall over backwards.

Occasionally he stopped thrilling her and scanned the faces of the bankers and brokers and yachtsmen and their bejeweled wives jabbering away at the other tables. It struck him that any first-class crook could have made a nice haul. The way the champagne was flowing, you could just pass the hat and they'd probably fill it up with diamonds, and not even care.

Still, that wasn't Bank's responsibility. He was here in high society because his friend, Vinny de



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Solo, was going to marry Vicky Hoskins. Vinny and Vicky—it even sounded like a love match, and the occasion called for a celebration. Bank, waiting for the next dance, figured out that the shindig probably set Peter Hoskins back around ten grand. Which didn't bother Bank a bit. He was concentrating on romance.

Her name was Carol something-or-other. He hadn't caught the rest of it or maybe she hadn't told him, but in due time he'd find out. Meanwhile his soft, almost gentle voice gave no indication it could drown out a foghorn, and he had her practically mesmerized. He was telling her the story of a homicide that he was making up as he went along. He broke off when he heard an apologetic cough and became aware of the shadow of a man leaning forward, just behind his shoulder.

Bank swung around. The long humble face and the ingratiating manner belonged to no guest. "Butler" was written all over him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Mr. Bankhart?"

"Yeah?" Bank said, telling himself there was only one reason for the interruption. There'd been a homicide somewhere, and Lieutenant Decker wanted him. Goodbye, romance.

"Could you come inside a moment?" the butler said. "Mr. Hoskins would like to see you."

The blue-eyed angel piped up in surprise. "Jasper, what on earth can Daddy want?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't say, Miss Carol."

Which told Bank a lot. Carol was Hoskins' younger daughter, and Bank was flying high. He put a big meaty paw on her bare arm and held it there long enough to watch the effect, which was promising.

"Be back," he said, letting his fingers slide down a couple of inches. "Wait for me."

"Forever," she breathed.

He realized she was kidding him, but he took it in stride. He pursed his lips in the form of a kiss, gave her a broad grin, and stood up. He threaded his way between the tables and headed for the canvas corridor that connected the tent with the main house. It had been raining earlier, but he heard no sound on the canvas top, so he assumed that the storm had passed.

Inside the house, in the wide paneled hallway, Jasper halted. The two living rooms and the spacious dining room were empty now. Only the litter of cocktail glasses and cigarette butts remained as evidence of the crowd that had been here a half hour ago.

"If you'll go upstairs," Jasper said, "Mr. Hoskins is waiting for you."

Bank nodded and headed up. The bedrooms—and there might be a dozen of them—were probably on the floor above. It crossed his mind that the jewel theft he'd

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thought about a few minutes ago might have been pulled off. Why else send for him?

Peter Hoskins, a somber, nervous, middle-aged banker of medium height, was waiting on the landing. His hands were rammed in his jacket pockets, and his attitude was grim.

"Mr. Bankhart," he said, "would you come into my wife's bedroom? There's been a tragedy, a—" he hesitated, licked his lips—"a murder, and you'd better take charge."

"Are you kidding?" Bank said.

"Hardly. And I hope you can handle this without spoiling the party. Vicky's engagement—this is a terrible thing to happen now."

"Let's go see," Bank said curtly.

Hoskins led him down the hall and opened a door at the far end, and Bank entered. He saw a large room lavishly furnished with a ritzy bed, a chaise lounge, a few comfortable chairs, a table, a color TV set, and a couple of bureaus. A jade lamp and one of the chairs had been knocked over, a bureau drawer and a wall safe were wide open, and a man lay sprawled on the floor. A cocktail glass was upended, just beyond his reach.

Bank walked over and stared down. The man was lying on his stomach, and his head was turned so that you could see one of his fixed, sightless eyes. A few drops of blood were barely visible on the light tan carpet, and the small rent in the back of his jacket might have been the exit hole of a bullet. The man was obviously dead.

Bank spun around. "Know him?" he asked Hoskins.

"Ronald Early," Hoskins said. His tone was clipped, as if he were repressing a deep emotion, and doing it only with great effort. "An associate. One of my oldest friends."

"Think he might have been committing larceny?"

"Impossible. I tell you, he was a close friend of mine. He had no financial troubles—I'm sure of it."

"He might have surprised a burglar, struggled with him, and got killed. What was in the safe?"

"A substantial amount of jewelry. Besides that, I usually keep a few thousand in cash."

"And the combination? Who knows it?"

"My wife had it written down on a piece of paper that she kept in her bureau drawer. She had a bad memory and—"

"See if the thing's still there."

Peter Hoskins bent down and rummaged in the drawer. After a few moments he straightened up. "No," he said. "It's gone."

"I'll notify the Homicide Squad," Bank said. He lapsed into the stiff, formal language of police reports, which over the years he had somehow or other come to adopt whenever he was working with the public. "Meanwhile would you instruct your staff not to move any of the vehicles in which your

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guests arrived, and to permit no one to leave the premises?"

Hoskins nodded. "You'll handle this as quietly as possible, won't you?"

"This is a homicide," Bank said. "Kindly carry out my instructions, and then return."

Hoskins left. Bank slapped his palm with a clenched fist, frowned, walked over to the phone. He examined it from varying angles of light and then, holding it gingerly in his handkerchief, picked it up. After speaking to the despatcher at headquarters, Bank called Lieutenant Decker and gave him a short summary of what had happened.

With that done, Bank stood in the center of the room and gazed around intently, covering it section by section. When he reached the area near the south window he spotted the bit of metal. He strode over to it, bent down and picked up a spent bullet. It was in fair condition and probably a .38. The place where he'd found it meant that Early had been standing with his back to the window when he'd been shot. The bullet must have gone clear through him, hit the wall, and then dropped.

Bank studied the flowered wallpaper, scanning the pattern row by row until he found the small slash where the bullet had hit. It had apparently bounced back and fallen on the carpet.

Bank, satisfied that he'd doped out the basic physical facts of the murder, saw that the investigation was going to be complicated. The guests had been milling around downstairs and there had been a steady stream of traffic to this floor, where people had checked their belongings at the opposite end of the hall. What with the rain, everybody had been wearing some kind of coat and had made at least one trip upstairs—including himself.

The initial questions then were why Early had come into Mrs. Hoskins' bedroom in the first place, and how come Hoskins had found the body, when he should have been out in the tent, being a host.

When Hoskins returned, Bank led with his first question. He did it obliquely, so as not to show what he was really after.

"Under what circumstances did you discover the body?" he asked.

"I didn't. One of the maids came in to tidy up. She saw the body and screamed, and then she went for Jasper. He notified me, and I sent for you at once."

"Get Jasper," Bank said. "And the maid."

Hoskins glowered as if he wasn't used to being ordered around, but he made no protest. As he started to leave, Bank remarked offhandedly, "Do you own a gun?"

Hoskins swung around in surprise. "Me?" he asked. "Me?"

"That's what I asked."

Hoskins shook his head slowly. "No," he said. "And if I had one, I'd certainly keep it locked up."

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"All right," Bank said. "Go ahead."

While Hoskins was gone, Bank spoke to the coatroom attendants, a couple of elderly women who were bragging about their grandchildren when Bank interrupted. The two women had been inside the improvised cloakroom all evening and had not seen or heard anything. Pretty much the same went for Jasper and the maid, who appeared a few minutes later.

Full stop.

Bank was alone in the bedroom when Lieutenant Decker, Chief of Homicide, and Jub Freeman, laboratory technician, arrived. A few minutes later Inspectors Taylor and Balenky and Small showed up, and then the Medical Examiner and the rest of the Homicide Squad, plus a couple of policewomen to help check out the female guests.

Lieutenant Decker, tall and gray and efficient, examined the body and the room, and reached the same tentative conclusions that Bank had.

"Bank," the Lieutenant said, "you've been hobnobbing with their majesties. What's your angle?"

"Hard to say," Bank answered. "Whoever opened the safe must have known the layout and where the combination was kept, but I don't see how that helps much. It could have been somebody in the household or even one of the invited guests. On the other hand, one of the servants could have learned where the combination was kept and either taken the jewelry himself or else tipped off an accomplice. The accomplice could have lost himself in the crowd. nothing to it. This was a crook's paradise."

"What were the arrangements for getting in here?" Decker asked "Have to show your invitation?"

"No. Hoskins owns about thirty acres. With the entrance to his estate almost a quarter of a mile from the house, you drove through the gates and a parking attendant took your car and gave you a ticket for it. There were station wagons waiting to take you from there up to the house, and you just walked in. Nothing formal, no receiving line or any of that jazz. I didn't see Vinney when I arrived, so I introduced myself to Hoskins and then somebody handed me a drink."

"Brother!" Decker exclaimed. "The catering staff, the orchestra, the parking attendants, and all the other flunkeys, besides a couple of hundred guests, and any one of them may be loping around with a pocketful of jewelry and a gun—if he hasn't stashed the stuff somewhere."

"It's worse than that," Bank said grimly. "Anybody wearing the right clothes and tipped off about the safe could have walked into the house, introduced himself to Vinny, and said he was a friend of Hoskins, or introduced himself to Hoskins

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and said he was a friend of Vinny's, and then gone upstairs and simply turned to the right instead of the left. That is, come in here instead of going to the cloakroom."

"The uninvited guest," Decker said, grimacing. "You think Early got shot for interrupting him? Could be. The uninvited guest could walk upstairs carrying a coat —that would look normal; but if he came downstairs carrying it or wearing it and headed for the door, that wouldn't look normal. He'd probably be noticed."

"So he'd have to forget about his coat," Bank said. "We'll have to wait for everybody to leave, and then if there's an extra coat, it's his."

Decker scowled. "There ought to be a quicker way. Bank, I'd like you to mosey around and pick up whatever information you can. I'll find me a place to set up shop. Anything you hear, let me know."

"Sure," Bank said. "I got me a private pipeline. A real nice one."

He went downstairs. Most of the guests had left the tent and congregated on the ground floor, which resembled a hotel lobby with three conventions going and all the delegates wandering into the wrong rooms. Bank, looking for Carol and hoping she'd see him in action and be duly impressed, strutted like the big-prize winner.

He picked up his first piece of information from Early's supper partner. She was a middle-aged dowager and she was talking excitedly.

"He was supposed to sit next to me," she said, "but he never came to the table. I was worried and I almost went looking for him because I knew he had a heart condition. He must have felt sick and gone to Mrs. Hoskins' room to rest up. How terrible!"

Bank moved off, horned in on a few useless tidbits of gossip, and heard everybody discussing how many people were there whom they didn't know. Which, to Bank, meant there was a pretty slim chance of picking out the uninvited guest—the man *nobody* knew.

He brought the news back to Decker, who had established temporary headquarters in a small cubbyhole just off the front door. The place was apparently a steward's or butler's office, and it had a tall antique secretary-desk with pigeonholes crammed with bills, menus, addresses, receipts, and all the other notes and papers pertaining to the complicated running of a large house. The phone was on a taboret next to the desk.

The Lieutenant listened glumly to what Bank had to report, and then brought him up to date on the investigation. The Medical Examiner had released the body, and it showed that Early had been shot at close range, practically a contact wound. The bullet—four lands with a right-hand twist—said .38 Smith & Wesson.

Although Decker had to check on a couple of hundred guests and

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almost a hundred workers, and was proceeding to do so, he was more interested in what he called the "in" group.

"This, for instance," he said. He picked up an invoice from one of the pigeonholes. "A liquor bill of almost a thousand last month, including Richebourg at twelve bucks a throw. What was this guy Hoskins like, anyhow? How did he react when you first saw him?"

"Negative," Bank said. "He's a cold fish. Cash register type."

"They all are," Decker said. "This desk is Jasper's, the butler's, and there's not a single personal item in it. Bank, I can't get the feel of the case, which is where you come in. That bunch out there—find out what they thought of Early."

"I'll ask around," Bank said.

"That gun bothers me, too. How did it get there? A society burglar or one of the guests toting it? Nuts. They don't pack guns, and certainly not two-pound cannons that would pull their clothes out of shape. I'll bet you two bucks to two bits that that gun was in the house before the party started, and that it's still here."

The odds were too good to pass up, so Bank pulled a quarter out of his pocket and put it on the desk. The Lieutenant placed a pair of bills next to it, and he grinned for the first time. "That quarter goes in the piggy bank for my grandson," he remarked.

Bank stared sadly at his coin and figured it was lost. "Expect to search the house later on?" he said.

"We won't find the gun," Decker said cryptically. "We've got to make it find us." And then he launched into one of his rhetorical flights, which meant he was all heated up. He used big words and said he refused to believe in a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances. Bank repeated the phrase a few weeks later to a dame he wanted to impress, and did. This, Decker went on, was the ineluctable outcome of individual forces working on each other to accomplish a preordained tragedy, and unless you grasped the concept and proceeded from there, you were doomed to complete and total lack of success.

Bank summed up the speech in two words. "Inside job," he remarked laconically.

Decker nodded. "Right," he said.

Bank, inflating his chest and towering over the mob outside, continued his search for Carol, and this time he found her. She was in the middle of confiding to a sad young man that she knew one of the detectives, and her eyes lit up when she spied Bank.

"I was hoping you'd find time for me," she said to Bank.

"Always have time for you," he said. "How are you getting along?"

She sighed. "It's so awful," she said. "It spoils everything. Vicky's party, Daddy's big moment, Mommy's trip—"

"Trip?" Bank said, interrupting. "Where to?"

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"To Paris, just for a few days, for a reunion with some old friends."

"And what was your Daddy's big moment?"

"He's due to get an honorary degree from his alma mater next week. He was so happy and proud, but this takes the pleasure out of it."

Bank, trying to imagine Peter Hoskins enjoying anything except counting his money, blinked. "He and Early were pretty close, as I understand it."

Carol nodded. "Yes. They went to college together, and ever since then Daddy has taken care of him—given him better and better jobs and almost made him part of the family. I called him Uncle Ron, although I never really liked him."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I just didn't."

"Think he'd rob your mother's safe?" Bank asked.

"You make it sound so ugly," Carol said, shuddering.

"It's plenty ugly, but you can help me a lot. Tell me, does Jasper know the combination of the safe?"

"Of course," Carol said innocently. "He knows everything. He's been with us for over ten years and he's sweet. He used to find all my toys when I was a child. I have a habit of losing things, but Jasper always knew where they were. I used to hide them on purpose and pretend they were lost, just to see if he could find them. He always did. He knows every nook and corner of the house."

"Valuable guy," Bank said. "Maybe he knows where the stolen jewelry is."

Carol's blue eyes gave Bank a cool stare. "Please don't joke," she said.

"It's no joke. Tell me more about Jasper, and about your Uncle Ron, too."

"I'd rather not," Carol said. "You make me feel like a stool pigeon."

"That's a strange thing to say. You want to see the case solved, don't you?"

"Not if it means hurting people like Jasper."

"Oh. I didn't know you were in love with him."

"I'm not," she said, and added flirtatiously, "I'm in love with you."

"That's mutual," he said awkwardly, and he had a yen to do something sensational—like make an arrest, pull the jewels out of one of the potted plants, toss off a brilliant deduction—anything dramatic, to impress Carol.

"Look," he said. "Mind if I stick around after everybody's gone? A couple of things I'd like to talk to you about, in private."

"About the case?" she said.

"Hell no. I just want to finish that story I was telling you at dinner."

She gave him a dazzling smile. "Then wait for me here, in the hallway," she said. "I just love your stories about crime and criminals."

The roll of a drum calling for silence made them turn away from each other, and Bank watched Pe-

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ter Hoskins climb up on a chair to make an announcement.

"My friends," he said, "you're all aware of the tragedy that has occurred, and I can only express my sorrow." He seemed to choke up for a second, before going on. "That isn't what I meant to say. I've been speaking to the police and they believe that the stolen jewelry may still be on the premises. I suggested that my guests would be willing to submit to a personal search on their way out. I'd like to apologize for the necessity, but—" He choked up again. "Well, that's all."

Bank grunted and found that Carol had left him. Somebody tapped him on the shoulder and he swung around to face Vinny. His usually bright, cheerful face looked haggard.

"Expect to find the jewels in somebody's pocket?" Vinny asked.

"No, but we have to give it a try." Bank patted his friend on the arm. "A hell of an engagement party for you," Bank said.

Vinny nodded. "I know. Wrong time, wrong place, but Bank—it was the right guy."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There was something about Early I never liked. He was a little too smooth. I wish I could spell it out for you, but I can't."

"Try," Bank said.

"It's chemical, I guess," Vinny said. "Vicky's chemical. From the first minute I saw her, I knew she was for me. With Early, it was the other way round. Nothing I can put my finger on. I just felt he was a heel."

"Carol didn't like him, either," Bank observed.

"Neither did Vicky," Vinny said. "But the old man—Hoskins, that is—you can't fool him. He knows people, and he trusted Early."

"Maybe he trusted him too much," Bank said.

"Hoskins never trusts anybody too much," Vinny said bitterly. "He's shrewd, my friend. He trusts nobody." Then Vinny's face brightened into his normal, open smile. "I'm talking too much," he said. "I'd better go find Vicky."

The exodus started soon after that. People filed up to the cloakroom, collected their wraps, and stood submissively at the front door. There, Charlie Small and Ed Balenky frisked the men, while a policewoman searched the women. Hoskins and Vinny, at Decker's request, checked off the names of all guests as they left.

Bank shouldered his way through the waiting line and entered the tiny room where Lieutenant Decker was still at work. Briefly, Bank repeated what Vinny and Carol had told him. Decker listened intently, then stood up.

"I'd like to talk to them, and have a look at this mob on their way out. You can take the phone a while. Donnegan, up at the precinct, will be calling in, and I asked Joe to get down to the Identification Room

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and run some M.O. cards to see what he can come up with."

Bank took the chair that Decker had vacated, and for the next half hour Bank loafed, answered the phone and let his imagination paint pictures of Carol and himself. Nothing important occurred either on the phone or inside his mind, and he was leaning back and thinking of the dinner he'd never finished, when the Lieutenant returned.

"All present and accounted for," he said. "No uninvited guest. Nobody trying to sneak out with a concealed pocket. Just a bunch of solid citizens cooperating with the police. Anything happen here?"

"Nothing much," Bank said, and reported the minor business that he'd handled. Then the door opened and Mitch Taylor came in. He was carrying a coat and he had that smug look of having turned up something important, but not wanting to brag about it.

"Chief," he said, "maybe we got something. This one coat—it's left over."

"Anything in it?" Decker asked.

"Some addresses in the pocket," Taylor said, handing Decker a few crumpled scraps of paper. "But the thing is, everybody around here is loaded. None of them would wear a coat that didn't set them back a hundred and fifty bucks at least, and this one—" He held it up to show the label. "Cheap, chain-store stuff."

Decker grabbed the coat. "You think the killer left this behind?"

"Well," Taylor said, "somebody did."

Decker smoothed out the notes and read one of the addresses.

*"Helen R. 54 Parkside."* He swung around abruptly and roared at Bankhart. "What the hell are you grinning at?"

"That's my coat," Bank said drily. "On my salary, where do you think I buy clothes?"

Decker burst out laughing. "Brother!" he said. "You and your harem!" He heaved the coat at Bank. "And take care of the thing before somebody swipes it."

It was after one in the morning by the time the Homicide Squad finally cleared out. Decker posted a pair of precinct cops outside the house and gave Bank permission to stay behind. Decker himself, along with a couple of the squad, would go to work on the names of the orchestra and catering staff. Jub Freeman was due to stay up most of the night analyzing the physical evidence he'd collected. Later in the morning a weary bunch would dig in and hope for some good leads to work on.

Bank, waiting for Carol and wondering whether she'd really keep their appointment, sat down on one of the tapestried chairs in the entrance foyer. He wasn't happy. With the "in" he had, he should have spotted some essential clue and hooked it up to the homicide. He

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felt he'd missed out somewhere; it left him restless and brooding.

He could hear the sounds of the household getting ready to retire for the night. A door slammed, a voice muttered something upstairs, water ran in a bathroom. A floorboard creaked, an electric motor vibrated faintly. After a while Carol came downstairs. She had taken off her party dress and was wearing a satin house-gown.

"Jim," she said softly. It was the first time she'd called him by name. "What did you want?"

"This," he said, and he took her in his arms and kissed her. She seemed to melt into him before she pulled away.

"Now," she said, sighing, "tell me what you really want."

He chuckled. "I'd like to look around the house. You know where things would be hidden—you said you used to hide your toys. Where?"

"Whom do you suspect?" she asked.

"A smart crook who was smart enough to park the stuff here for a while and who expects to come back." And he explained the theory of the uninvited guest.

She listened with interest. "Maybe," she said, "but you can't use me to snoop. I told you that before."

"I've got a job to do."

"Then do it without me," she said.

"Can't. Carol, you're holding out on me, and that's all wrong. Tell me. You'll feel better for it."

"But it's so much fun to hold out," she said, frankly teasing him. "I just love the way you look at me, as if you weren't quite sure what to make of me."

"You're a strange girl," he said. "I can't quite figure you out."

"And you're not going to. At least, not tonight. Because it's late, and I'm awfully tired."

"Tomorrow, then?" he said. But she merely smiled and led him to the door. There he kissed her again, and while her arms were around him, he slipped the latch. He went outside quietly.

The pair of precinct cops recognized him, and he spoke to them in a loud voice. "Boy, am I pooped! It's been quite a night." Then he signaled them not to ask questions, and he walked over to a clump of bushes and stationed himself there, concealed from the house.

After about ten minutes he stepped out, signaled the cops again, and tiptoed back to the house. He opened the door carefully and slipped inside. He had a feeling that something had to happen. Thinking back, something pulsed at the back of his mind—the recollection of something wrong, of something that somebody had said or done, which he'd only half noticed at the time and then, in the excitement of events, had forgotten.

He stood silently in the hallway. It was lit dimly by a night light. He frowned, uncertain what to do next. He wished he had his gun. Accord-

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ing to regulations, he was supposed to carry it at all times, but who in hell would carry a gun at the Hoskins' posh engagement party? Still—

He heard the creak of a board, the slight jar of someone colliding with the banister on the floor above. He moved back, ducked down behind a chair, and crouched there, out of sight.

After a few moments Carol came down the stairs. She was still wearing her house-gown, but she was barefoot and she walked stealthily. He watched her glide across the hallway and stop in front of the darkened doorway of Jasper's office. She hesitated, as if she knew she was under observation.

She stepped back suddenly and looked around. The dim light splashed on her cheek, and she rubbed it gently. Then, in a quick change of mood, she raised her head defiantly, pushed open the office door, and stepped inside.

Bank stayed where he was. He heard the swish of Venetian blinds being drawn. A light snapped on and Carol came to the doorway for a final look around. When she went inside again, Bank crossed the hallway and stopped in plain view. She was too intent on what she was doing to notice him.

He watched her shovel papers out of the pigeonholes, reach inside, and rummage. At the third pigeonhole she found what she was looking for. A section of the desk swung out and revealed a secret compartment. Bank waited long enough for her hand to emerge with a fistful of jewelry and a very businesslike revolver. The Lieutenant had been right—Bank's bet was lost.

Bank must have made a noise just then. Carol whirled, holding the gun and pointing it at him.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Better put it down on the desk," Bank said calmly. "It's no use."

"You think—" She broke off as he took a step forward. "Don't!" she said sharply.

Bank forced himself to smile. "Going to shoot me, Carol?"

"If you take one more step—yes."

"What do you expect to do?" Bank asked. "You can't get away with this. You realize that, don't you?"

"I'll tell you exactly what I'm going to do," she said. "I'm going to drive out to the country and throw these things away where nobody can ever find them, and then I'm going to come back and go to bed, and nobody can prove I even left my room. If you claim I did, I'll just laugh at you."

"Go ahead," Bank said.

There were two cops outside, and they'd grab her as she went out the front door. And even if there was an inside passageway to the garage and if she got past the cops, all Bank had to do was pick up a phone as soon as she left.

"And," Carol said, as if she was reading his thoughts, "I'm going to

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lock you in a closet while I'm out. Now step back."

She was quite a gal, and she had a fair chance of getting away with her scheme, for the time being, anyhow. She'd get caught eventually, but Bank thought of how the squad would ride him. The boob who got himself locked up in a closet. She'd double-talked him right from the beginning, played him for a sucker.

Romance!

It was more than his pride could take, and he stood in front of her and put his hands on his hips and laughed at her.

"I'll give you exactly two seconds to move," she said. "One—"

Her blue eyes were cold. This must have been the way she'd looked when she had killed Early, standing no more than a foot away from him, the gun almost touching his heart. Then—

Bank stepped back. "I wouldn't want to stand in your way," he said. "Impolite. So just tell me what to do."

"Turn around and walk to that coat closet," she said. "Over there." She gestured with the gun and indicated with a toss of her head where she wanted him to go. The instant her eyes left him he dived.

The explosion of the gun practically burst his eardrums, and he felt something hot sear his scalp. But he had his hand on the barrel of the gun and was twisting it away from him when something crashed on his head and knocked him sideways. He went sprawling. The gun bounced out of Carol's hand and he landed on top of her and knocked the breath out of her. She gasped, and her body squirmed. He rolled free, climbed to one knee, and whirled.

Peter Hoskins was standing a few feet away, and he had the gun. It was aimed directly at Bank.

"I was afraid of something like this," Hoskins said.

Bank glared. Carol, with barely enough breath to speak, managed to say, "Daddy—what—"

"Let me handle things," Hoskins said to her. "What brought you down here?"

"Him," she said, pointing at Bank. "He kept saying the jewelry was hidden in the house and that the police would come back and look. I was afraid they'd look here, because it's the best place to hide things, isn't it?"

"Apparently not," Hoskins said, "since it's the first place you thought of." He pursed his lips. "Get up, the pair of you." He waited for them to stand up before he addressed Bank. "How did you figure things out?"

"We had you tagged right from the beginning," Bank said, and he wondered why he hadn't guessed right off. Hoskins and Early—best friends were always the ones who killed each other. Husbands killed wives and business partners killed each other. The closer people were to each other, the greater the likeli-

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hood of concealed and repressed hatred.

"The cocktail glass," Bank said, voicing for the first time the clue that must have been there in the back of his mind. "Early wouldn't have gone into the bedroom carrying a cocktail unless he expected a friendly chat with somebody he knew pretty well. Like you."

"I shouldn't have left it there," Hoskins said. "Was that my only mistake?"

"Just tell me why you did it," Bank said. "Why did you kill him?"

"Go out into the hall," Hoskins said. "Both of you."

They obeyed, and Hoskins, with the gun still on Bank, edged back into the doorway. One of Hoskins' shoes trampled on a diamond bracelet. He swayed and almost tripped, then kicked the thing aside, as if it was so much junk.

"Why did you kill him?" Bank asked again.

"He was a rat," Hoskins said bitterly. "We were friends in college, close friends, and it all goes back to that, when he took some exams for me. I was no good in sciences, and he took some chemistry and physics exams for me. A couple of other people knew about it, so Ron could prove it easily.

"I was always grateful to him. I took him into my firm and gave him a good job. I thought he was my best friend. Then, when I was offered an honorary degree, the greatest thing in my life, he threatened to tell about that old exam business. I know what that would have meant. Cancellation of the degree. Scandal and everybody laughing at me."

"Daddy!" Carol exclaimed. "It wouldn't have mattered."

"It would have mattered to me," Hoskins said coldly. "He wanted a million dollars to keep quiet—a million in stocks and bonds, and a full partnership. But nobody can do that to me. Nobody orders me around.

"I told him I'd give him my answer this evening. Luckily I had a gun that I'd bought many years ago, when we once had a robbery scare. It was a gun nobody knew about and that couldn't be traced. So I told him to come upstairs to my wife's room. There I shot him, opened the safe, took out the jewelry and cash so that it would look like a burglary, and then I brought the stuff down here, to the best hiding place I knew."

"Daddy," Carol said shakily, "put down that gun. You'll—"

"Exactly," Hoskins said. And still covering Bank, Hoskins edged back into the small room and slammed the door. Seconds later, the shot rang out.

Bank looked at Carol. She was standing stiffly, as if paralyzed. When he moved toward her, she shuddered and said in a choked-up voice, "Don't touch me!"

Bank sighed. Then he stepped past her and opened the door.

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# magazine BOX SCORE for 1965

In editing his fourth volume of BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1966 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 17 stories, of which 15 appeared in magazines (and of these 15 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 100 stories from magazines and 9 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 100 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1965:

| *name of magazine* | *Honor Roll stories* | *percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine | 55 | 55% |
| Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine | 15 | 15% |
| The Saint Mystery Magazine | 10 | 10% |
| Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine | 4 | 4% |
| Argosy | 2 | 2% |
| Playboy | 2 | 2% |
| Saturday Evening Post | 2 | 2% |
| Atlantic | 1 | 1% |
| Cavalier | 1 | 1% |
| Cosmopolitan | 1 | 1% |
| Diners' Club Magazine | 1 | 1% |
| Gamma | 1 | 1% |
| Horror | 1 | 1% |
| Mademoiselle | 1 | 1% |
| MD | 1 | 1% |
| Ladies' Home Journal | 1 | 1% |
| Rogue | 1 | 1% |

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly twice as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 55 Honor Roll stories in 1965 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.



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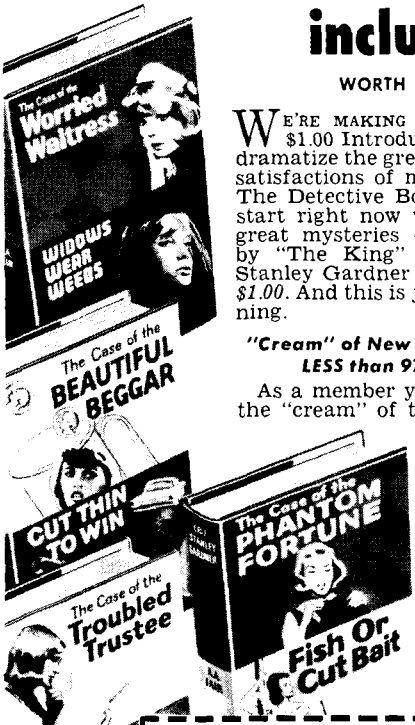


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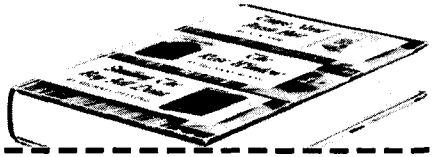

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